LAND OF THE FREE

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

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LAND OF THE FREE

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BY

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

AUTHOR OF

THE GENTLEMAN FROM VIRGINIA,
DRAG HARLAN, ETC.

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CHAPTER ONE

THERE was a mist over the land that morning. But on the top of the mesa, where Dan Blackburn sat crossways in the saddle on Red King, the air was clean, sparkling and bracing.

The mist was just below Blackburn. It was fleecy and tenuous where it followed the gigantic sweep of slope that stretched for miles downward until it merged with the floor of a still more gigantic basin, but out into the gulf of space it was as thick and impenetrable to the vision as the land below it. Like a white blanket it stretched over the face of the world, spreading into the dim reaches of distance; a soft, downy and undulating sea of vapour, shimmering in the first bright lances of the sun.

Above the mist was perfect, clear white light stretching so far that the eye ached in its efforts to distinguish the horizon. No horizon could be seen. North, east, south and west the mist swam under the white light of the sky in such harmony of shading that one could not tell where the mist ended and the sky began.

It appeared to Daniel Blackburn that the entire continent was submerged by the mist. Eastward, straight into the sun-lances, the face of the mist, moving with its

slow undulations, seemed like the broad bosom of an ocean. A man as imaginative as Daniel Blackburn could easily look back through the centuries and envisage the caravels of Columbus drifting their slow course toward the land.

Quite as readily, gazing southward, Blackburn could imagine Cortez approaching Mexico, and the other Spanish and French adventurers sailing their barques in the great waters.

And yet, though those adventurers had been picturesque and bold, they did not grip Blackburn's imagination as a picture of another band of adventurers gripped it. For Blackburn was an American. Dominating all his other visions came one of a bleak New England coast, a wild, gray sky, and the *Mayflower* easing to anchor in foam-crested waters.

Came swiftly now other pictures.

Various settlements springing up along the eastern coast. Block houses. Barricades. Stockades. Little meeting houses. Maids in calico and poke bonnet. Men in knee-length breeches and high-crowned hats, bearing blunderbusses. Sturdy, hardy Puritans. Indians. Red-coated soldiers. A welter of turmoil and strife. A fine progeny surviving the darkness and emerging into the clear light of a new day. A beginning. Earnest folk laying the foundation of an empire. Striving, fighting, winning. America.

Gazing westward, Blackburn saw no pictures. From that direcion no adventurers had come. Some had gone. But they had been land travellersand the mist concealed their trails. When the mist lifted he could trace out a great many of them.

And the mist was lifting. Far away, perhaps a hundred miles, perhaps a thousand, since the air was so clear, he could see the peaks of some mountains above the mantle of fleece. Rugged and sharp, grim, sombre, majestic. He watched them while the mist settled around them, sinking, slowly disintegrating.

Down, down, went the mist. Slowly the mountain peaks seemed to rise, like leviathans breaking the surface of the sea, with wisps of fleece clinging to them. The ocean of mist was now thickly dotted with peaks. Far away, running from north to south, was a crenellated ridge so near the surface as to appear like breakers guarding some wild shore.

The mist grew whiter as the sun rose. Its surface shimmered like polished silver. It flattened; the billows and the undulations went out of it. It spread, motionless and level.

Half an hour later, while Blackburn still sat crossways in the saddle, watching, the white sea had sunk until the higher peaks of the mountains rose hundreds of feet above it. The crenellated ridge had become a mountain range. A high plateau, joining the shoulders of two mountains, became visible.

And at this instant Blackburn discerned movement on the surface of the mist. At a distance of several miles, and well out from the sombre peak of one of the mountains, came a horse and rider. The horseman was riding on the surface of the sea of mist, which stretched before him as straight and level as the floor of a desert. So clear was the atmosphere that Blackburn could see the fleecy wisps that clung to the hoofs of the horse as the animal loped through it.

Here was an illusion. If Blackburn had not known better he would be almost convinced that the mist was supporting the horse and rider; that Pegasus had been reincarnated by the mythological gods.

Blackburn smiled. He was aware that the horseman was riding a high level upon the shoulder of a mountain and that the mist had descended until it was just covering the trail. Still, when he observed that the horseman was slowly disappearing, like a swimmer slowly wading down a sloping beach into water, the illusion of the rider sinking was so vivid that Blackburn involuntarily straightened.

Presently only the rider's head and shoulders were visible; then the sea of mist was as calm and motionless as before. Blackburn knew that where the horseman was riding he could plainly see the trail ahead of him; it was distance that made the mist impenetrable to Blackburn.

The mist had come every night during the summer and every morning it covered the land. It was unusual, annoying. An unseasonable contact of two atmospheres, creating condensation. Cold air swimming above the mountains, pressing down upon the warm air in the lowlands. A persistent, constantly recurring condition. A monotonous phenomenon, a devastating visitation.

Blackburn had figured it out. In his opinion the cold air floating above the mountains was holding the rains back. There had been no rain since the previous autumn. Not a drop. Not a cloud in the sky. In the section during the winter there had been no snow, and as a consequence the riverbeds, that should have been bursting with water in the early spring and for some months during the summer, had been dry as dust.

The rivers were now as dry as the land; and the land right now, in September, was baked and shrivelled, as it had been all summer and spring. There had been no grass. No water. Nearly all the wells were dry, and had been dry for months. The country was burned and gasping. In all the canyons; in the valleys, the arroyos, the gulches, the barrancas, were strewn the skeletons of cattle dead from the drought. There were a few survivors. But these had long since wandered away into the mountains in search of water. Neither Blackburn nor Calder, nor any of the ranchers in the vicinity had made an effort to turn back the surviving cattle. When the survivors had staggered away they were too few to bother with.

One dry season had followed another. And now the herds were decimated. No breeders were left. There was no foundation upon which to build herds for the future. Both Blackburn and Calder had spent money prodigally and fruitlessly until there was no more to spend. Calder was wiped out—ruined. Blackburn had remaining a few head of horses, his ranch equipment, his buildings and his land. Also, there was a small amount of money left in the bank at Springer City. But his credit had been exhausted. So had Calder's.

Blackburn saw that his reign as a cattleman was over. Twenty years ago he had started here, and it had taken the best part of his life to get where he had got when the drought had ruined him. He'd not start again, raising cattle. Something else. He hadn't decided, but certainly he'd get into something.

This was a free country. If a man could not make a living in one section he could go to another. A man's

activities were not restricted by law, as in some countries. In America there was always a chance for an enterprising man. Blackburn did not blame the country or the weather for his misfortunes. No one was to blame, the country least of all. What had happened, had happened. That was all there was to it. He'd lost, and he'd have to start over.

There were many places to start. Eastward were hustling cities, towns, villages. They dotted the face of the land. Day by day they were growing, expanding. Hundreds of trains were at that minute crossing the continent bearing goods and supplies to the outposts. From the Great Lakes to the Gulf, roads were teeming with traffic. From the Atlantic seaboard to the Golden Gate new roads were stretching. The rivers were alive with boats. Activity, industry, enterprise. Why should a man admit failure?

Blackburn gazed eastward over the mesa, across the vast tableland over which he had ridden to search the western horizon in search of rain clouds. The mist had vanished. Before him the dun land stretched flat and featureless except for the huddled collection of shanties in the far eastern distance known as Springer City.

Westward too, the mist had vanished except in some of the smaller basins and around the bases of the mountains. Clear and distinct now loomed the salient features of the land. Rugged buttes flamed in the sun. Battlements of red scoria, eroded by the elements, tall granite spires thrusting upward like church steeples, bastioned tower and minaret, gorges, gulches, barrancas, draws, arroyos, valleys, basins, forests, spread before him as far as his gaze could reach. He could distinguish well-

known trails over which, in other days, he had watched hardy adventurers moving. Gold seekers, Mormons, transcontinental wanderers in prairie schooners, desert rats on burros, cowboys, Indians on the warpath, buffalo, elk, deer, pony express riders, stage coaches, outlaws. Passing westward, always westward.

The pioneers. Hardy men, seeking wealth and adventure. Daring. Doing. Not content to wait, but restlessly moving on, away from established settlements. Away from New York, Baltimore, Jamestown, Plymouth. Halting only temporarily at the outposts in Virginia, Kentucky, along the Great Lakes, in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas. Moving through the wilderness to build homes. Going singly and in small groups into Texas, North Dakota, Montana. Drifting through to New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona. Breaking trails. Enduring hardship, conquering pestilence, surviving Indian warfare.

Young men, mostly; or older men with the spirit of youth in their hearts. Some women, but mighty few of them. Those that came were worthy of the sons they bore. Worthy of America. Men who lingered in the settlements were of hardy stock also, else they had not come to the New World in the first place. Yet men who remained in settlements were gregarious, lacking the urge to roam. Not less courageous than their fellows who threaded the paths of the wilderness, yet preferring their adventures in the populous centres. The stern and the gay, patrician and ploughman, the Latin, the Saxon, the Hun, the Slav, the Celt—all were to be found in the hordes of the westward drift.

Daniel Blackburn's eyes were roving the land. His gaze, still westward, was fixed upon the rider he had

previously seen riding the surface of the mist. The horseman was now descending a slope that led out from a foothill at the base of the mountain that lifted from the valley directly below Blackburn, and the light was now so clear that Blackburn could distinguish the colour of the horse the man was riding, a gleaming sorrel. The man himself wore a gray sombrero. The other details of his attire could not be distinguished, but the sun shone on the gray hat as upon a disk of silver.

The rider continued downward. He reached the level of the basin and began to cross it. As he drew opposite a long strip of wild brush a faint, white puff of smoke seemed to leap out of the brush toward him. His horse stopped, reared. The man tumbled out of the saddle and dropped to the sand of the trail. Blackburn saw the gray hat strike the ground and roll a little distance. At the same instant there reached Blackburn's ears a faint, dry "crack."

Blackburn's lips formed the one word:

"Rifle."

Blackburn did not move. Below him, in the big basin, a murder had been committed. Yet he could do nothing. He was high up on the edge of the mesa and at least two miles distant from the spot where the man had fallen from the saddle. There was nothing to do except to wait and see what else would happen.

For a time there was no movement in the basin. Then a man stepped out of the brush near where the rider had fallen. This man wore a black hat. He stood for some minutes at the edge of the brush, seemingly looking at his victim. Then he strode to where the fallen man lay and seemed to gaze down at him. Later he

stooped and appeared to be removing something from the other man's clothing. After a while he stood erect and seemed to scrutinize the basin. Then he vanished again into the brush, only to emerge shortly, leading a horse.

The animal was a plains pony, of a light mustard colour, bearing a heavy cow saddle.

The murderer mounted the pony, rode it close to the man he had killed. For some time he sat in the saddle, the pony motionless. Then suddenly the pony wheeled and bore the murderer eastward, along the faint trail that led through the bottom of the basin, around the base of the mesa toward a gorge that rose gradually to the higher country.

Blackburn watched horse and rider out of sight. Later his gaze returned again to the floor of the big basin. The gray hat was still gleaming in the sun. A dark spot against the shimmering white of the alkali dust on the bottom of the valley showed him that the victim of the ambush was still where he had fallen. Far up in the brilliant sky a Mexican eagle swam in narrowing circles. From some distant covert in the hills a coyote barked.

CHAPTER TWO

IN ORDER to reach the bottom of the big valley Blackburn had to ride several miles across the mesa to gain the mouth of the gorge through which the rider of the mustard pony had gone.

Blackburn rode fast, and yet when he came to the edge of the mesa overlooking the entrance to the gorge the rider of the mustard pony was already miles eastward.

Blackburn drew Red King down and gazed at the dust cloud which accompanied the rapid movement of the mustard pony.

"He's fannin' it some!" was his thought.

That was natural. A man who had committed murder would want to place distance between himself and his victim as quickly as possible.

Blackburn's brows were screwed together. He had recognized the mustard-coloured pony; he was reasonably sure he knew the rider. Yet a grave crime had been committed and Blackburn hesitated to take snap judgment.

From where Blackburn rode he could not be seen by the murderer, even if the latter should look back, for a wooded ridge intervened and Blackburn had kept behind it in the hope that the murderer might have dallied long enough to permit a glimpse of his face. But the murderer had not lingered.

Blackburn rode around the ridge and down a draw to an arroyo leading to the mouth of the gorge. Two hours later he was sitting motionless in the saddle gazing down at the huddled form of the slain man.

A few hundred yards from the murdered man the sorrel horse moved slowly along the edge of the brush which had concealed the killer, searching for grass. The Mexican eagle was swimming in ever-broadening circles, screaming defiantly.

The murdered man was lying flat upon his back. Blackburn dismounted and closed his eyes.

Blackburn had never seen the man's face before. His features were those of an Indian, and his straight, black hair, thick and coarse, offered mute proof of his ancestry. He was dressed in dark corduroy trousers, which were stuffed into well-worn, high heeled boots; a brown woollen shirt and a loose, dangling vest. Around his waist was a cartridge belt studded with cartridges for the Colt .45 which was stuck in a holster with the flap buttoned. In a saddle sheath on the sorrel horse was a rifle. The saddle itself was a worn affair; and the sorrel horse had the appearance of having been ridden hard.

Blackburn was puzzled. The man was a stranger, and there was apparently no reason why he should have been a target for the murderer's bullet. So far as Blackburn could perceive, there had been no motive for the killing. And yet as the murderer had lain in wait for the rider he must have known that the latter would ride that particular trail.

Blackburn mounted and rode toward the sorrel horse. There was nothing about the saddle through which the

man might be identified; there was no brand on the horse, no ear-marks. There was, however, a chance that identification might be made by an inspection of the rifle in the saddle holster, and so Blackburn roped the sorrel and investigated. The weapon was a late model Winchester and bore no distinguishing marks. Since the owner would not need the rifle again Blackburn took possession of it. His first intention was to turn the sorrel horse loose, but he reflected that perhaps a claimant might one day put in an appearance. So he restored the rifle to the saddle sheath and led the sorrel back to where its owner lay.

Again dismounting, Blackburn sought a mark of identification. He found nothing and was about to give up when at a little distance a small leather pouch caught his gaze. The pouch was lying close to the prickly bulk of a niggerhead cactus, and upon examining it Blackburn found stamped upon the leather in small letters the legend: "Wells-Fargo."

The leather of the pouch was soft and pliable, indicating that it had not been long exposed to the weather. It was open, and empty except for one twenty-dollar gold coin which was snug in a fold of the leather close to the draw-string. Blackburn placed the coin in a pocket and rolled the pouch in his slicker.

Standing near the slain man Blackburn's gaze went downward to the footprints in the sand. He had obliterated some of the prints, but others remained. He followed two sets—one set that came from the brush from which the shot had been fired, and another set that returned. In an open space in the brush he found where

the murderer's horse had stood. The animal had been there a long time; had been there when the mist had covered the basin.

The murderer's horse was shod. Blackburn observed a certain peculiarity of the fore hoofs. The left one was turned slightly inward. Following the hoof tracks as they went out of the brush, Blackburn made sure of the peculiarity of the left fore hoof. His lips tightening, he returned to the brush. There, after a close scrutiny of the spot where the murderer's horse had stood, he picked up a soiled and worn tobacco pouch upon which, apparently with a small branding iron, had been burned the initials: "S. C."

Blackburn inspected the tobacco pouch and shoved it into the pocket that held the gold coin. Then he went out of the brush, scooped a shallow trench in the sand with his hands, placed the body of the murdered man in it, covered it with sand and built a mound of rocks over the body so that the coyotes could not get at it. Later he rode up the gorge toward the mesa, leading the sorrel horse.

Simeon Calder!

Blackburn had recognized the mustard-coloured pony. He had recognized the man himself, but had hesitated to believe that Calder could commit such a crime. He had not wanted to believe. But the evidence of the initialled tobacco pouch was conclusive. Simeon Calder was a murderer. The deed had been done with cold premeditation. The express messenger had been given no chance.

Calder. Blackburn's neighbour for a score of years. A

big, gruff man, a little loud of voice, somewhat boastful and, until now, harmless. A good neighbour, though somewhat careless and improvident.

Blackburn was depressed; he had hoped it would not be Calder. Calder had a good woman. A fine-looking daughter just reaching the age of adolescence. A boy of twenty who though a trifle wild would make a good man. Blackburn's depression grew.

He rode homeward, across the mesa; down a slope at its eastern side into a gigantic valley.

Paro Basin. His home for more than twenty years. He had ridden every foot of it from the Pinanello range at its southern limits to the rugged Calientos which reared their frowning peaks one hundred and fifty miles northward, and from the Continental Divide westward to the gigantic uplands eastward, a distance of more than two hundred miles. A wilderness domain when he had first entered it from the east, driving his tired horses down the great slope toward the green and inviting grasses that stretched as far as he could see.

He had gone far out into the basin before bringing his horses to a halt. Beside a creek he had made his first camp, and upon the site of the camp he had built the small cabin which was later to grow into a low, rambling, but imposing ranch-house.

He had preëmpted a quarter section of land—one hundred and sixty acres. Later he had bought more, from settlers who came, proved their land, grew discouraged and departed. At the present time he owned nearly two thousand acres. Yet the land was now valueless to him because of the drought. At a forced sale—conceding he could find a buyer—it would not

bring enough to pay his indebtedness to the bank at Springer City.

Calder was equally involved. In fact, Calder was in desperate circumstances. Calder had sold everything that could be sold. A week ago Calder had told him that if something didn't turn up he and his family would face starvation. At the time he had observed that Calder's eyes had a wild glare—like that of a cornered and desperately harried animal.

He had done what he could for Calder through forcing a small loan upon him—half of his own meagre possessions. And now Calder had murdered a man!

As Blackburn rode through the basin his thoughts reverted to an incident that had occurred at Springer City a week or so ago. He had gone to town to attempt to negotiate another loan from Forbes, the banker; and had been refused. From the bank he had gone to Melcher's place, the only store in Springer City, where he found a group of men talking of the subject that interested all of them, the drought. He had taken little part in the conversation, because he had talked himself "out" on the subject. He had lost interrest in the tales of hardship and misfortune.

But while he had been standing there he had heard a man mention a word about a gold shipment. The shipment was to the bank at Springer City, and was coming by messenger. The stage had been held up often. The man did not say where he had got his information, and nobody questioned him. But now Blackburn remembered that Calder had been in the group when the tale had been told.

It was long past noon when Blackburn rode up to the

corral gates near his ranch-house. Dust, inches deep, covered everything. Little mounds of it had gathered on the tops of the posts of the corral fence. The roofs of the buildings were thick with it. It lay in windrows on the house, in drifts upon the window sills. Little whirlwinds incessantly travelled about. In the pastures where once there had been grass there was now only dry, feathery powder which erupted in miniature volcanoes when one walked through it. Swimming high in the air was a veil of dust, which the brilliant sunlight caught and wove into phantasmagoric patterns and colours. Dust! it filled the sky; it drifted into the house; a pall of it had spread over the world. For months Blackburn had breathed it, had eaten it with his food, had found the water roiled with it. It was in his hair and would not be washed out because the water he was compelled to use was thick with it. It had been grimed into his face; it had got under the collarband of his shirt and covered his body. It was in his eyes; it was heavy upon his brows; it was slowly and gradually conquering him.

That was the way he felt to-day—as though in the end he would succumb to it and become dust himself.

He was amazed though, to find his wife and daughter looking fresh and clean. He stood in the kitchen door looking at them as they greeted him. They were preparing his dinner, having seen him coming. Both were smiling.

Women! Shucks! They had twice the courage of men. They were brave; they could conceal whatever mental torture afflicted them. Imagine his wife and daughter appearing fresh with the dust all about them! Smiling at

him! Greeting him cheerfully! He grinned faintly in return, took his vest and shirt off and washed his face and hands in the tin wash basin that stood on a bench outside the door.

His wife came to the door and smiled at him. She was forty-two. Three years younger than he, and as fresh looking as when he had married her, more than twenty years ago. She had grown rather stouter. But he admired her more than ever. Yet though she was smiling at him there was an unspoken question in her eyes.

"There's no signs of rain yet," he said, answering her question. "There ain't a cloud as big as a man's hand in the world. I reckon it ain't ever going to rain again!"

A flash of anxiety shadowed her eyes, but she smiled through it. She knew he had been again to the mesa, searching the skies.

"Well," she said, "you'd better come in and have dinner. And maybe it will rain soon, after all."

Jane Blackburn, his daughter, said nothing. She was seventeen, just budding into womanhood and beginning to take on character. She was demure, steady, level-headed. She was pretty now, giving promise of beauty. Beauty and common sense. There was a combination. No foolishness about boys. Her eyes were dark, deep, serene. She didn't fool around with the boys now, but when she did fall in love she would go all the way. No halfway foolishness about her!

Blackburn said nothing about his adventure. Before he had got out of the gorge leading up from the valley where the messenger had been killed he had changed his mind about the sorrel horse. No use taking the animal to the ranch, where it would hardly be able to

subsist upon the feed he would be able to give it. So he had removed saddle and bridle and rifle and turned it loose in the valley. He had hidden the saddle and bridle in a recess behind a shoulder of rock that jutted out into the gorge, about halfway up toward the top of the mesa.

In his pocket were still the express pouch and the gold coin, and the tobacco pouch with Calder's initials on it. Before he sat down at the table to eat he went into his bedroom and stuck the articles under the mattress.

He sat down in a chair at the table and began to eat the food that was placed before him. He kept his gaze straight before him, for he felt heavy and depressed over his discovery of Calder's lapse from the honourable ways of life and he knew that if he looked long enough at his wife she would divine that something was wrong with him. She had an uncanny knack of knowing when he was mentally disturbed. Some women were like that. A man couldn't fool them.

So he ate in silence, answering his wife's questions in monosyllables whenever possible. They were questions about the condition of the country.

It was not until he was nearly through eating that he became convinced that there was an odd note in his wife's voice—and in his daughter's voice too, whenever she spoke. A sort of a lilt, a repressed breathlessness.

Twice he stole glances at them. They had ceased walking about the room. His wife was sitting in a chair near a window. She was facing him, watching him with a strange intentness. Her eyes were glowing. In them was

an expression that puzzled him. It seemed to him that she was pleased over something and was attempting to conceal her pleasure.

Well, he couldn't see anything to be pleased about. Nothing could happen. There was the dust, the heat, the decimated herds, the baked and shrivelled land; the bones of cattle strewing the country; the prospect of ruin. In fact, there was the certainty of ruin. Nothing to be pleased about.

And yet into the atmosphere of the room had come something that he could feel. Something new and unusual. A breathlessness. A tingling sensation. A prescience of achievement; a divination of a change of things for the better!

The blood pounded in his veins. His appetite left him, though he still sat at the table pretending to be interested in the food. The third time he looked up covertly he observed his wife smiling broadly at the daughter. He pushed back his chair with an abrupt movement and with both hands gripping the table edge looked straight at his wife.

"Well," he said soberly, "you've got some news. Tell it!"

The wife's voice was shrill; repression was no longer in her.

"It's the land, Dan!" she cried. "The land! A new railroad is coming through here! Right straight through the centre of the valley! They want a right of way one hundred feet wide straight through. Fifty feet of our land and fifty feet of Calder's! They will pay you twenty thousand dollars and Calder twenty thousand!"

Blackburn's face whitened. His grip on the table edge tightened.

"How do you know?" he asked hoarsely.

"The agent was here this morning!" the wife told him, her eyes widening when she observed how his hopes clung to her answer. "Dan, he was eager. I closed the deal with him! I gave him an option until he could see you and have it done regularly. He was in a hurry and could not wait for you to come home!" She rushed to his side and spread out before him on the table a check for five thousand dollars.

Blackburn stared at the paper which would save him from ruin. Then he stood up and drew his wife to him. He patted his daughter's head. He sat heavily down and again stared at the check.

"He gave Calder one of these?" he asked. "Do you say that he bought Calder's land, too—the same as mine—a fifty-foot strip? And paid him for it?"

Mrs. Blackburn nodded vigorously. Her hands were crossed over her bosom. "He came here from Calders'," she said. "Simeon was not at home. He paid Mrs. Calder the same as he paid me."

Blackburn stared straight ahead. He was looking through the walls of the ranch-house into the basin below the mesa, where he again saw a puff of smoke streaking from a stretch of brush and a man falling headlong from the back of a sorrel horse.

"The fool!" he whispered hoarsely, "The fool!"

CHAPTER THREE

SIMEON CALDER was positive that no one had seen him commit the murder. He had ridden out early, while the mist still covered the land, when he would not have been visible to another horseman riding within a hundred feet of him. And when the mist had been lifting he had scanned the country in every direction in search of movement that would have warned him of the presence of probable watchers. He had seen nothing, nobody. He had been alone in the basin. He was sure of that. And twice while he had been ascending the gorge that led to the mesa he had looked back over his shoulder. He had seen nothing behind him except the sorrel horse and the dark blot on the sand near the covert which had hidden him when he had fired the shot.

Yet though Calder was satisfied that the murder had been committed without witnesses he rode his horse away from the spot at a speed that betrayed the mental panic that had assailed him. He was breathless; a strange terror had taken possession of him. Never before had he killed a man.

Calder was big. His shoulders were massive. He was big-boned, tall, muscular. His hair, just beginning to show streaks of gray in it, was wavy and abundant. His features were large and well formed, but there was a looseness about his lips which other men had observed—

which strangers took note of before they saw anything else about Calder.

Calder's lips were white as he rode eastward. He was breathing heavily, although the physical exertion of riding had never before bothered him. And by the time he had placed several miles between himself and the spot where the murder had been done he was trembling and fatigued. It was as though he had been running instead of the horse.

Calder was aware that he would not dare to go directly home. His wife would be certain to observe his condition. She would become curious and would ask questions that would embarrass him. He felt that until he could calm himself he did not want to see anybody. So when he reached the timber that stretched along the banks of the creek near his ranch-house he kept behind it, screening himself from view until he reached a forest of spruce a mile or so from his buildings.

Somehow when he was once in the shelter of the trees he felt better. He breathed more easily. He halted the mustard horse, dismounted and wiped the perspiration from his face, neck and forehead. He sat down in a clump of grass in the shade of one of the trees and tried to relax.

The hot September sun was rebaking the sand. The needles of the hardy spruce trees were dangling limply. Some nearby cactus looked dry and dead. A pall of dust swam heavily between earth and sky and diamond-like particles eddied around him. The air was thick with dust. Dry dust. Feathery dust. Dust of various colours and shades—gray, dun, white, red, purple—according to the way the sun struck it. It obscured the landscape.

The dust and the dryness had killed the grass, had drunk all the water, had killed all Calder's cattle, had ruined him. Now, thinking of what the dryness and the dust had done, he did not feel so keenly regretful about the killing of the express messenger. He grew sort of vindictive, as he had felt before the killing.

The killing had been forced upon him. There had been no other way of getting money for his immediate needs; money for food! For months he had sullenly raged, cursing the heat, the dust, the dryness; blaming nature, blaming his own shortsightedness in ever coming into the country—almost blaspheming. He had been amazed at the way Dan Blackburn had taken it. Saying nothing, blaming nobody. Not cursing, not complaining. Looking every day for rain that did not come.

Well, Blackburn was an undemonstrative man. Blackburn always kept a good grip on himself. He had never seen Blackburn exhibit rage or lose his self-control in any way. There was no doubt that Blackburn suffered, but Blackburn had the strength to suffer.

That was the chief difference between Blackburn and himself. Things that Blackburn took calmly were torture to Calder. And Calder knew the reason for it. It was because he was more sensitive than Blackburn. He felt things more keenly; he had a greater capacity for feeling. For one thing, he could not endure doing nothing while he watched his family starve. Blackburn could stand even that.

But Calder could not stand it. That was why he had killed the messenger.

Now that he had grown more calm he felt that the crime he had committed was not so terrible. He had

killed an Indian. Other men had killed Indians and had thought nothing of it. Shucks. An Indian. He was a fool to feel bad about it. Yet there was something disturbing in the fact that the Indian had been arrayed in the garments of a white man. He kept thinking about that. It made some difference. What the difference was he could not determine. Perhaps it was because, in addition to wearing the clothing of a white man the Indian was also acting as an agent for white men—for a powerful organization of white men!

Yes; that was the difference. And what he felt was not regret, but apprehension. It was a feeling that the organization of white men would make an attempt to discover and punish the murderer of their agent.

Calder spent several hours in the spruce forest. He had grown calmer. He had ceased perspiring. Holding out his right hand he observed that it no longer trembled. Feeling the gold which he had concealed about his person, he conceded that he had been repaid for what he had done. There was satisfaction in knowing that his family would not starve.

Shortly after noon he rode out of the spruce forest toward the ranch-house. He turned his horse into the corral, carried saddle and bridle into the stable and hung them from their pegs. Peering out of the stable door he observed that no one was watching him. Going to a corner of the stable he secreted the gold pieces under a section of rotted sill, in a corner, retaining only two of the coins in a pocket of his trousers.

When he at last entered the house he was outwardly calm, although it seemed to him that his wife needed only to look at him to observe his guilt. Somewhat to

his astonishment his wife's glance at him contained neither curiosity nor suspicion. In fact, she smiled at him.

His daughter Mary was in the kitchen, and his son, Jerry. Jerry was sitting in a chair near a window. Jerry was smiling. Jerry had not smiled very often lately, since things had been going bad, and Calder was somewhat amazed that the boy should smile now, when there seemed to be nothing to smile about. Still, he did not look steadily at Jerry, for fear the boy would find out something.

He glanced at Mary as he wiped his face on the towel after washing. The girl was not smiling, but there was an unusual sparkle in her eyes. She was standing in the doorway that led from the kitchen into the big living room.

Calder reddened. He took his time wiping his face with the towel in order to steal another look at the three of them, in an effort to discover what it was they were smiling about.

He was puzzled. They would not be smiling if they knew what he had done. Nor was there any suspicion in their glances at him.

He grew defiant. They knew something which they were holding back from him. He threw the towel down to the back of a chair and strode to the table, which was set for him. He drew back the chair which stood at the place where he always sat at the table. He stood erect and looked belligerently at his wife.

"Well," he said gruffly, "what's up?"

He stared at the oblong piece of paper which his wife placed in his hands. It was a check for five thousand dollars, made out to him and signed by a name that he did not recognize.

He paled and stared at all of them.

"What's this?" he asked.

"It's from an agent for the new railroad that is coming through here," his wife told him, her voice leaping. "The man came this morning, right after you left. The railroad wants a strip of our land fifty feet wide straight through. They will pay twenty thousand dollars for it. The man gave me five thousand for an option, to hold the land until he can see you. He bought the same kind of a strip from the Blackburns. Anyway, he said he intended to. And he went there from here. Simeon, ain't that wonderful!"

Calder dropped into the chair at the table. He laid the check on the table in front of him, spread it out and stared at it. He felt his wife's hands on his head, caressing him. He vaguely realized that his son and daughter were dancing about the room. His thoughts were jumbled. He was conscious of only one emotion. One sentence kept pounding through his brain:

"If this had only happened yesterday! If this had only happened yesterday! If this had only happened yesterday!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE rains came. They came too late to revive the grass or to restore vitality to the gaunt cattle that still were left. But they brought relief from the dust and the heat and the dryness, and they raised the creek to the limits of its banks and washed out the atmosphere so that there no longer came to the nostrils of the people of the basin the stench from the dead carcasses which were strewn over the land.

There followed an autumn chill and then a long and beautiful Indian summer, with its soft colour and its lazy winds, when a golden haze came over the land. In the haze worked an army of labourers with tools and equipment, who lived in tent houses along the right of way and who laid two lines of steel straight through the basin to the purple hills.

Because there was a natural dam and a deep pool in the creek near the centre of the basin, the railroad built there a pumping station and a water tower, where their trains, going westward up the long slope of the Divide, could take on water sufficient to last them until they reached the country beyond. They built there also a switch and a spur and a storage shed for materials. And since men were required to run the machinery of the pumping station, and since it was convenient to establish headquarters for a section, they built two shanties to be used as dwelling houses, painting them red after

the manner of the water tower and the pumping station.

In such a fashion was founded Paro City. Other cities of the republic had been founded more modestly and with less pretentiousness. Many of them in the beginning had not the advantages of a railroad. One chose its site upon a level beside a bridle path. Another grew and flourished on the banks of an unnavigable creek. Still another established its buildings in a gorge, and some sought the altitudes of hills and plateaus. A water hole in a desert provided sufficient reason for the building of another town which in its later days grew important and powerful, while a streak of copper or of gold or of silver brought other towns into being overnight. In localities where cattle flourished were built towns of another type. Towns rose in the mountains, in the valleys. The plains brought them forth. Deserts were dotted with them. Forlorn towns with frame shanties and a pitiful masquerade of prideful architecture, sprawling and crude, fouled by rubbish heaps and notoriously lacking in law and order.

A beginning. The beginning of growth; the stirring of an impulse to achieve, to be free from the restrictions of Old-World domination. The yearning of adventurous spirits seeking a new haven. An army of freemen sweeping toward a new Eldorado.

In the conquering of the wilderness nationality was a negligible element. While the English were firmly entrenching upon the land that later was to form the thirteen original colonies; even as they were pushing westward toward the valley of the Mississippi, the Latin races were sweeping through the savannas of the Gulf

coast. While Daniel Boone was fighting the Red Men in Kentucky, a certain subject of Louis named Pierre Laclede was establishing himself upon the mud banks of the "Father of Waters." While Lewis and Clark were seeking the Pacific coast led by a Shoshone squaw and Toussaint Charbonneau, a band of hardy men in buckskin were preparing to found an empire in the Southwest which was later to be distinguished by its lone star. Upon one page of the chronicles appears Vincennes, upon another San Antonio and the Alamo. Fort Dearborn merges its history with Dodge City by overlooking the hiatus of a generation, and the gold-seeking "Forty-Niner" is followed closely by the cowboy, who was worried little about his ancestors and still less about the nationality of his fellows.

Slowly the stream swept westward, bearing upon its crest its strange mingling of adventurers from all parts of the world. Daniel Blackburn and Simeon Calder had preceded the stream by a few years, and when the tide crept upon them they were established in their valley domain. The founding of Paro City came too late to save Simeon Calder from committing a crime; it came in time to save Daniel Blackburn from ruin.

Yet outwardly no man could have told that Blackburn had been saved or that Simeon Calder was guilty of a crime. For Blackburn changed not at all, and Calder very little. Blackburn bore his prosperity calmly and with dignity. As soon as it became evident that Paro City was to grow he set about to anticipate its progress by laying out his land into town sites. Some of it he sold almost immediately. But a great deal of the land along the right of way he held. When spring came he was

breaking ground for a hotel, because he foresaw from the way Paro City was growing that such a building would be necessary. For late in the fall, when the railroad had stretched its rails into the purple hills, came the Stream.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIMEON CALDER had sold nearly all of his land. Even though he had disposed of much of it at a price considerably lower than he could have obtained for it had he held it longer, there was to his credit in the new bank a larger sum of money than he had ever dreamed of having.

The land Calder had sold had been built upon. Calder himself had erected the first building in Paro City, following the red structures of the railroad company, and within a year from the date of the completion of the "Calder Block" there were a score of other buildings to keep the Calder Block company. Calder's building had been erected so that it faced the railroad right of way, with just space enough between the right of way and the front wall of the building to provide for a street and a sidewalk. Within a hundred feet of the Calder building was the water tower. Down a little distance in the other direction was the section shanty. Since Calder had finished his block the railroad had constructed a station, which was a long, low, shed-like affair, painted red, like the other buildings belonging to the railroad. All the railroad buildings were on the side of the rails nearest the street Calder had laid out, and from the beginning Calder's side was doomed to cheapness and tawdriness.

It was upon Calder's side of the tracks that the rail-

road company built its cattle corrals and its runways; and when the copper mining company built a spur which ran to their mine in the distant hills it was upon Calder's side of the tracks that they dumped the ore that awaited shipment. Later too, the new coal mine established a spur upon Calder's side. Then came a grain elevator and sundry other buildings of a like character.

However, Calder was not disturbed. His attitude was that he had sold the land and that its new owners could do what they pleased with it as long as they didn't bother him.

Calder was riding high upon the wave of his new-found prosperity. He had opened the first saloon in Paro City, and it was to his establishment in the Calder Block that the thirsty element of Paro City gravitated. There was not an hour of the day or night that Calder's saloon closed its doors. The long bar was a gold mine to Calder, and there were times when three bartenders were kept busy there.

Calder himself never served any drinks. Arrayed in garments that were extravagant in design and colour, he mingled with his customers, drank with them, played host to them. There were times when Calder would stand in the open doorway of his saloon with his thumbs caught in the armholes of a flowered vest, and indulge triumphant thoughts. He had grown rich and powerful. Men were glad to know him. He numbered his friends by the hundreds. Forbes, the banker, who had moved his bank from Springer City to Paro when he had seen that Paro was to outstrip the older town, was flatteringly friendly. Merchants took him into their confidence.

Calder had grown heavier. His big frame was rapidly

becoming sheathed in excess flesh. His stomach bulged the flowered vest and flabby folds of fat had appeared at the back of his neck and under his chin. His former healthy colour was slowly changing to an unhealthy red.

His manner had altered slightly, also. He had always been addicted to boasting in a loud voice. He boasted no longer, but treated those who knew him with a rollicking geniality. He was so good natured that he laughed when there was no apparent reason for laughter.

Yet Calder's joviality was surface. He could never get the express messenger out of his mind. He kept seeing the man fall from his horse. While talking with a friend, or listening, he would remember the expression of utter stupefaction upon the messenger's face when the bullet had struck him. He'd hear the bullet—Thud! A hundred times in a day. A thousand times at night—unless he went to bed drunk. And even then he would awaken toward morning with the knowledge that he had been seeing the messenger in his dreams.

But there was one thing about whisky. It was potent while the first exhilaration was upon him, anyway. It made no difference that each day—and night—he had to drink more and more of it to efface the memory. He had plenty of whisky.

Back in his subconscious mind was the conviction that his reason for starting the saloon was to make certain that he'd always have plenty of whisky near him, and that drinking it in his own place would not arouse nearly as much talk as if he were to drink it across another man's bar. People expected a saloon-keeper to drink.

By degrees Calder had put into circulation the gold he had secured after killing the messenger. It had taken him a long time to dispose of the gold, for he had not dared to use much of it at a time. A piece here and a piece there had been his method of ridding himself of it. Five thousand dollars in twenties and forties. But at last he had disposed of it all, and no one had suspected him.

Yet he had wondered how it would have fared with him if the railroad company had not fortuitously happened to pay for his land upon the day he had killed the messenger. He would have had the gold, but he would not have been able to place it in circulation in the section without bringing suspicion upon himself. For the shipment had been for Forbes' bank at Springer City, and Forbes and all the merchants of Springer City would have wondered at his possessing gold coin after having endured a two-year period of poverty.

Well; it hadn't been necessary for him to offer any of the gold coin in payment for supplies. He had used the money given him by the railroad company, and every gold piece that had been passed out to him at the cashier's window of Forbes' bank had been supplemented with another when he made purchases anywhere. And after he opened the saloon he had boldly made deposits of some of the gold pieces, knowing that the banker would assume that they had come to him in the regular channels of trade. So now they were all gone, and he felt more secure.

Yet he was still uneasy. Curiously, he was always thinking of gold pieces, and he had not been able to

restrain his curiosity concerning what had happened to the messenger's body.

No one had reported finding the body. There had been some talk about the non-appearance of the messenger at Springer City. Later came an agent of the express company to investigate, but the agent had discovered no trace of the man. It was finally reported that the express company had decided that the messenger had left the country, taking the gold with him. No one had reported finding the sorrel horse, and it was Calder's opinion that the animal had either joined a band of wild horses or had been picked up by a chance traveller.

Calder would have felt better if he had had some positive information. It was all right for the express company to report that they were satisfied that the messenger had stolen the money, but he felt that the report was a ruse to allay the apprehension of the man they felt had really stolen the shipment. He felt they were secretly investigating.

What worried Calder most was the fact that no one had reported finding the body. In the first days following the killing of the messenger Calder had endured great mental torture. When the sun shone intensely he thought of the body lying there exposed to it. When the rains came he drew mental pictures of the water forming a pool about it. At night, when the coyotes yelped, he shivered. He felt easier when the snows came, but his agony increased when in the spring the rains again washed the earth and the floor of the basin became green and virile.

Early in May he had not been able to restrain his

curiosity any longer. He saddled and bridled his horse one morning and rode out alone toward the mesa. He made a great circle to convince himself that he was not being followed, and when he reached the head of the gorge out of which he had ridden after committing the murder, he was shaking with an unnamable emotion.

Later, looking down upon the cairn of rocks that Blackburn had erected over the shallow grave of the messenger, he ejaculated the one word:

"God!"

The grave was upon the exact spot where the messenger had fallen. Some one had come upon the body and had buried it, and the discoverer of the body knew the man had been murdered!

Calder was pale and shaken when he got back to Paro City. For the first time in many days he walked back of the bar and poured himself a drink. Standing there, with the gaze of the bartenders upon him, he drank several glasses of whisky—drank until the colour returned to his face, until the liquor fortified him with a false calmness.

Late that night when he went home he was staggering a little. But his brain was remarkably keen, his thoughts clear.

There was a moon, and as Calder left the edge of town a great section of the basin was exposed to him, its salient points flooded with a mellow brilliance. He could even see the mesa and the dark gash beside it where the gorge ran down into the lower valley where the cairn of rocks had been built. He began to tremble. He turned and gazed back at Paro City, with its rows of buildings, and for an instant he felt that he was dreaming. For he

was again experiencing the emotions that had beset him more than a year ago when he had fled from the scene of his crime.

He walked on, toward his house. When he reached the rear porch he was sweating, though the night was cool. He sat down on the edge of the porch and mopped his forehead. There was no sound from inside the house. Only one light was burning—a kerosene lamp upon the table in the sitting room left expressly for his usual late home-coming.

He fell to thinking about the sign he had erected over the front door of his saloon when he had opened the establishment. Why had he yielded to the mad impulse to name his place "The Gold Coin"? Why had he caused gold coins to be inserted between the joints of the tile floor? Had it been mere bravado? Defiance? Love of money? Sullen desperation?

He did not know. The gold coins were in the floor of the saloon; the gilt sign in front bore the legend: "The Gold Coin."

And now, sitting on the edge of the porch in the moonlight, he remembered an incident connected with the erecting of the sign on the front of the saloon building.

He had been standing on the street watching the sign painters erect the sign. They were drawing it upward with pulleys, and there were several persons besides himself watching the men. Among the watchers was Dan Blackburn.

Blackburn had said something to him about the sign. What had Blackburn said?

Nothing much; nothing that had seemed significant to him then. But now?

What had Blackburn said?

Calder concentrated. Something about gold coin. He remembered that Blackburn had been smiling—slyly, significantly, with his steady eyes searching Calder's. Smiling strangely, confidentially, as if there was some sort of a secret between them.

Damn it! Why couldn't he remember what Blackburn had said?

Smiling accusingly! Calder squirmed, sweat broke out on him again. Almost he had it there! The words were right on the tip of his tongue.

"Gold coin"? No. "Where did you get it?" No; that would—Calder would have wondered at that. "Why the 'Gold Coin'?" No; Blackburn hadn't said that. Something like it, though. Ah! Here it was:

"How much gold coin, Calder?"

That was what Blackburn had said.

That question! The look in Blackburn's eyes!

Blackburn had been trying to tell him that he knew! Blackburn had seen him! Blackburn had buried the messenger, and had erected the cairn of rocks over the body!

Good God! What a fool he had been!

CHAPTER SIX

OF THE Calders, Mary was least affected by the wave of prosperity that had struck the family. She had been just past sixteen upon the day when the railroad agent had brought the check to the ranch-house; she was now a few days past eighteen, and her steady, level gaze, her habit of delaying a smile until there was something to smile about, her outward calmness when everyone else yielded to excitement, added years to her appearance.

She dressed plainly. She wore her hair closely combed, straight back from her forehead and from her temples, curving it into bulging waves and coils at the back. Her frocks were simple, although since her father had become wealthy the quality of the material was the best obtainable. She wore no jewelry whatever.

Yet Mary Calder was beautiful. Her colour was that of perfect health: her skin white and satiny in spite of the sun and the winds; her gray eyes were clear and sparkling; her shoulders straight and her body lissom. She was calm, serene, wholesome. Watching her as she walked about Paro City, men who knew women had remarked that she was "sensible."

They could not say that about the other members of the Calder family, and they did not. They slyly poked fun at Simeon Calder, in spite of his extravagant geniality; they openly jibed at Jerry Calder, the son, who was

twenty-two; and they winked at one another when Mrs. Calder appeared in their vision, while their thoughts went instantly to Kerry Baldwin, the proprietor of the Palace Dance Hall. There were few of the residents of Paro City who did not know that Kerry Baldwin and Mrs. Calder were together more than they should be. There were some who wondered if Mary Calder knew what they knew about her mother.

Mary knew. But when she passed down Paro's main street there was about her no visible sign of her knowledge. Not a blush when men stared at her and yet no sign of haughtiness which would have betrayed that she knew and was trying to conceal the knowledge.

Mary saved her hot blushes for the moments when she was alone. She was too proud to let anyone else see them.

Yes; she knew. She knew that her father drank too much, and that every day he was drinking more. She knew that her brother gambled and drank; that he was a spendthrift and a wastrel and was growing "tough" with the hard sophistication of youth in its first dawning consciousness of the allurement of sin. She knew that her mother and Kerry Baldwin were——

She didn't know what. Her observation had not yet proved anything to her. She would not take anybody's word; she would have to see for herself. And if the relations between them were what everybody suspected, she would leave.

She was alone in the house nearly every night. She never went to sleep until her father and mother came in. She didn't care so much about Jerry, for there were nights when Jerry never came home at all.

She was waiting up again to-night. She sat in a stiff-backed chair at one of the windows of her room, in her nightgown, with the cooling breeze pressing against her hot cheeks. Before her were the lights of Paro City. She could see far into the moonlit reaches of the basin. Away from Paro stretched the two glistening lines of steel that had brought Paro City into being. Far over on the other side of the glistening rails, gleaming gray in the moonlight, was the Blackburn ranch-house.

The Blackburn house was dark. It was dark every night shortly after ten, with few exceptions. There was dignity about the Blackburn ranch-house. There was about it a serenity and aloofness that created an ache in Mary Calder. Something she could not define, yet a something, she divined, that could not be attained by the Calders.

She thought she knew what it was. It was in the Blackburn character. Blackburn was a quiet man, slow of speech, deliberate, thoughtful, considerate. These qualities of character had been inherited by his children, Jane and John. Mrs. Blackburn had acquired them by loving her husband, by watching him and unconsciously imitating him. As a result the Blackburn family was worth while.

Everything the Blackburns did proved their quality. In the first place, when prosperity had come upon them they had not changed their mode of living. Visibly, anyway, they were the same as before. There was no ostentation, no loud talking in public places, no boasting, no revelation of their new wealth. If Daniel Blackburn bought a new horse and buggy there would be no advance notice of his intention. It was more like Blackburn

to have the horse and buggy for several weeks before letting them be seen. And when he finally drove to town and some one charged him with having bought a new "rig," he would smile and reply that the "rig" was old now, he having had it for several weeks.

Yet not since prosperity had come had one of the Blackburns appeared in new clothing. Their clothing seemed to be better than they had worn before, but it did not appear to be new. Rather it seemed to be clothing that had been worn before, though carefully preserved. Mary Calder, though, was aware that the clothing was new. It was conservative and neat and lacked the gaudiness of most of the clothing worn by the citizens of Paro.

Mary Calder visited the Blackburns often. From the time she and Jane Blackburn had been children they had played together and shared their little confidences. Now Mary ran over whenever the mood struck her.

There had been no change in the Blackburn attitude toward her, just as there had been no change in the Blackburns. Mrs. Blackburn was as kind and as motherly as ever, Blackburn was as slow of speech and as considerate. Her welcome was as cordial as ever. Even John was the same to her. Yet every time Mary visited the Blackburns she came away feeling as if a barrier was slowly rising between her and her friends. And there was no doubt that the barrier was being erected by her own family, by their various uncouth actions, by their tawdriness, by their cheapness.

Mary knew that Mrs. Blackburn and Jane pitied her, although they never said or did anything to give her that impression. Mary knew, however, that they must

be aware of what everybody was talking about; they could see what was happening.

But Mary did not let them know that she was aware of their pity. It was only when she was alone, as she was to-night, that the hot blushes of shame tinged her cheeks.

The acquisition of money had damaged the Calder character. All of them, except herself, had lost their self-control, had yielded to the intoxication of sudden wealth. Years of drudgery and self-denial had undermined them; they had not the sturdiness of character to resist the mad exhilaration of prosperity.

But why hadn't they? The Blackburns had been no better situated when the windfall had come. Yet in the Blackburn home were peace and dignity and reserve and consideration, while in the Calder house there were strife, contention, continual bickering and quarrelling, drunkenness, cheap display, turmoil.

Mary saw her father coming home. She observed that, as usual, he staggered as he walked toward the house. She heard him seat himself on the edge of the porch; heard him talking to himself. She was glad that it was dark, so that no one could see him.

Later, after he had got upstairs and into his room, she heard him mumbling to himself; heard his shoes drop to the floor; heard the bed creak as he got into it. After that, for more than an hour, she heard his snores.

Still she did not go away from the window. The last light in Paro went out before she caught sight of her mother coming toward the house from the direction of town. There were two figures in the moonlight, and they approached slowly, as though talking. A man's figure,

which she knew because of its bulk belonged to Kerry Baldwin, was close to the other. Mary felt that the man's arm must be around her mother.

She had seen them in that position before, and she was not astonished. She felt only disgust for both of them.

The couple paused beneath a juniper tree. The leaves created shadows in which they stood for a time. Mary could hear the low hum of their voices. Twice her mother's voice was raised in a sort of silly, girlish laughter. Then Kerry Baldwin began to walk rapidly back toward town, while Mrs. Calder moved swiftly toward the house.

Mrs. Calder was just stepping upon the edge of the porch when Mary, arrayed only in her nightgown, opened the screen door of the kitchen and stepped out. Amazed, somewhat frightened, Mrs. Calder gasped:

"Why Mary, what on earth are you doing down here at this time of the night?"

Mary's face was as white as the nightgown she wore. But her voice was steady.

"I have been watching you and Kerry Baldwin," she said. "I have watched you a great many times. Mother, if you must go to dances why can't you stop at the Gold Coin and have father bring you home?"

"Well, of all things!" gasped Mrs. Calder. "Imagine! A mother being reprimanded by her own daughter! I'll have you to understand that I am able to take care of myself!"

"You may be, Mother," said the girl. "But have you ever stopped to think what people might say about your coming home at this hour with a man like Kerry

Baldwin? It isn't only yourself that you have to think about, Mother. There is the rest of the family."

The moonlight shone straight into Mary's face, but her mother's was in a shadow and so Mary could not see the flush of guilt and rage that stained it.

"I'll do as I please about that, Mary Calder!" she said. "I do not have to answer to anybody for my actions! And if you dare to insinuate that there is anything wrong between Kerry Baldwin and me, I shall slap your face!"

"Yes," answered the girl, calmly, "I suppose you would even be capable of doing that!"

She braced herself for the expected blow. But the blow did not come. Instead, evidently fearful that Calder would be aroused from his sleep by the sounds of the quarrelling, Mrs. Calder squeezed past the girl, whispering angrily:

"Go along upstairs, you fool! Do you want to disgrace the family!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE days before the coming of the windfall breakfast at the Calder home had been an event.

Calder would be up first. He would build a fire in the cast-iron kitchen stove, put the tea kettle on with water secured from the well, go out to the stable and feed the horses that were kept in the stalls, watch the windmill for a few minutes, and perhaps walk down along the creek in the early morning air to see how the water was holding out. After doing several of his customary chores he would return to the house and wash in the tin basin that always stood on a bench outside the kitchen door. Then he would go into the kitchen to see how the fire in the stove was coming along.

Usually by that time Mrs. Calder was up, bustling about the kitchen. Mary would be hovering near, helping. Sometimes Jerry would be down, ravenously hungry. Appetizing odours would float out of the kitchen door to the porch, where Calder usually established himself while awaiting breakfast. Talk, laughter and good-natured banter passed between the members of the family. Even when the drought came upon them, when there was very little food on the table, there was affection.

When Mary came downstairs this morning Calder had already gone. There was no fire in the kitchen stove.

The kitchen itself was spotless, for Mary had cleaned it the night before and had spread a new cloth on the table.

There was an atmosphere of emptiness in the room, a dead or devitalized spirit. Carelessness, unconcern, diversified impulses, selfishness, a breaking of a familiar routine.

Mary stood for a moment in the kitchen thinking of the previous night, of many nights when the same things had happened. Her cheeks were pale, she set her lips tightly, went out and gathered some firewood, started the fire, placed the tea kettle over it and went out to the porch, where she stood, staring out into the basin.

When she went into the house a little later she made coffee and drank a steaming cup of it. She did not place the breakfast dishes on the table, for she knew her mother would not be down until nearly noon. And she was aware that for a long time Jerry had not taken breakfast at home. Some time during the morning he would get up, looking hollow-eyed and saturnine, hitch his horse into the new phaeton he had bought and drive to Paro. That would be the last she would see of him until the next morning unless, as it sometimes happened, she would catch a glimpse of him in town.

Mary went out and fed and watered the horses. She knew her father hadn't taken care of them. He never did, any more.

The place had a neglected appearance. The corral fences were down in several places, the buildings needed repairs. Mary's lips grew white as she went about her tasks. She curried her own pony, a brown animal with a blaze face; put a saddle and bridle on him and led him

out to the kitchen porch where she hitched him to one of the slender columns.

Prosperity had brought Mary few things besides some new and modest wearing apparel. She went upstairs and put on a brown riding habit, came down again, mounted the white-faced pony and rode out into the basin.

She wanted to think; she had to think, and she could not think clearly at home. She wanted solitude; she wanted to make up her mind about certain things, for she knew she could not much longer endure the present shame and humiliation.

The morning air was keen and bracing, and she sent the pony westward, straight into the breeze. For a time she rode parallel with the railroad tracks; then she turned southward to follow a dim trail she had ridden many times of late. It took her behind a low ridge south of the big mesa; it led her through a deep gorge into which tumbled the creek that flowed near the Calder ranch-house. Beyond the gorge, after a long upward climb, she came to a shallow valley, cradled in some hills.

A high country. From the crest of a ridge she had looked back at Paro City, which had appeared toy-like. Noon had come when she rode close to a mound of grass under a big cottonwood tree, trailed the reins over the head of the pony and permitted him to graze. She had watered him at the stream in the lower gorge, and she knew he would not want to drink again until she reached the gorge on her return.

The valley into which she had come was several miles in width and perhaps twenty miles long. It was off the main trail that led over the Divide, and she was aware

that few of the men in the section ever rode here unless they came to graze their cattle. She knew, too, that a herd had grazed here recently, for the grass was clipped short. Cattlemen in the Paro basin seldom grazed their cattle here, for there was plenty of grass in the big basin —when there was any at all in the vicinity—and this valley was left for the use of the cattle-owners of a vast arid section southward. There was a pass through the southwesterly end of the valley, which led out into the arid section. That trail was used more than the trail that ran eastward, for Mary could see it from where she stood—a broad, dun-coloured, sinuous and undulating track, cut by countless hoofs of cattle, wandering its way southwestward toward the arid land.

The valley was wild, silent, slumbrous. The hills that rimmed it on the south were wooded. Along the bases of the hills was a fringe of tall brush. Behind Mary sank the gorge where the waters of the creek tumbled over the granite rocks on their way to the lower country. Standing, Mary could not look over a ridge of rock that lay between her and the edge of the gorge. She had been on the crest of the rock ridge, though, and knew something about its formation and the general design of the little canyons that intersected the gorge. One could easily get lost there, and so her investigations had not been so very thorough.

She dropped into the grass under the tree, stretched out on her back, locked her hands back of her head and gazed at the sky.

The sky was cloudless. For a long time she watched a Mexican eagle floating in mile-wide circles above her. He sailed with no apparent effort, his wings motionless.

She watched him until he became merely a black speck against the deep blue background of sky. When he vanished, her thoughts went to her family and the set expression again returned to her face.

The breeze was balmy, the warmth of the sun pleasant. Mary must have dozed, for when she again opened her eyes the day was going. The sun was low.

However, she did not move, although she knew that she should be heading her pony homeward. She could not move, for fright paralysed her. For, standing within half a dozen paces of her, his arms folded over his chest, his gaze intent, his lips half-smiling, was a man she had never seen before.

Her fright came not because the man was a stranger, but because of the intentness of his gaze and the strange smile upon his lips. It seemed to her that he must have been standing there for a long time, watching her, and that he had discovered that she was alone.

He was a big man and well built. His shoulders were broad, his chest arched, his waist slim. His legs were adorned with brown, silk-like corduroy trousers which matched his coat, which was belted in a fashion new to her. He wore a white shirt, a low, standing collar, white as the shirt, with a string tie of black silk; a flowered vest, something like the one her father affected; a broad-brimmed black Stetson hat sat jauntily upon his head, disclosing raven-black curly hair; high-heeled polished boots of soft black leather encased his feet and ran to his knees. He had good features, and his skin was as white as her own except where the blue-black sheen of his beard showed through it. She felt he must

have shaved that very morning, and that he was fastidious.

However, these details of his appearance were not impressed upon her until afterward. She had observed them in one flashing glance.

The man was standing beside a great black horse, which was saddled and bridled. The reins were trailed over the animal's head, and it seemed to Mary that horse and man would be distinctive figures anywhere.

Her own pony was not in sight, and her first coherent thought was of him. She got to her feet and stood erect, blushing and resentful. Her eyes flashed as she gazed at the stranger.

"You had no right to stand there, watching me!" she declared.

"I beg your pardon, miss," returned the stranger. "I could think of nothing else to do. You were sleeping so peacefully that I hesitated about waking you."

"You might have gone on about your business!" she charged.

"And left you here alone? Well; perhaps I should have done that if I had seen your horse anywhere in the vicinity. I think he must have strayed. There are tracks around, but no horse. And so I decided that if you had come from a distance, and your horse could not be found I might give you a lift. I am going to Paro City."

The stranger's voice was low, soft and apologetic. He had doffed his hat at the instant she had opened her eyes to look at him, and it still dangled from his left hand as he spoke.

His manner did much to allay her apprehension.

Evidently his intentions were of the best. He smiled, and Mary discovered that she was not as angry as she had been.

"Had you been asleep long?" he asked.

"Well," she answered, growing more calm, "I think it must have been about noon when I sat down here to rest."

"It is after four, now," he said. "Therefore, if your pony decided to stray, he has had time to go a considerable distance." He smiled at her. "If you will wait here I'll look around."

"There doesn't seem to be anything else for me to do," Mary answered. "Will you hurry, please? There are bad spots on the trail that I should not care to try to ride in the darkness."

The stranger bowed to her, replaced the hat upon the black curls, mounted and rode along the slope of the valley at the edge of the rock wall. Mary moved down the slope a little distance the better to watch him. After a while he rode into some timber at her right, and for a long time there was no sign of him. In half an hour, however, he again came into view, far out in the valley. Still later she saw the black horse standing motionless upon the crest of a ridge. The stranger was erect in the saddle, peering about him, his eyes shaded by his hand.

Mary stirred uneasily. The day was going. She was aware that there were certain sections of the trail that could not be ridden at night unless there happened to be a bright moon. The thought of riding at night with a strange man for company almost terrified her. She did not know enough about men to trust any of them. She would not have gone riding at night with any

man. Around Paro, perhaps. Certainly not on a wild trail like the one that she must ride to get back to the ranch-house.

She stood, tortured by impatience, watching the stranger.

He was making a thorough search. Mary saw him dipping into gullies, peering into coverts, riding around clumps of brush and into stretches of timber. The sun was just sinking behind the peaks of the hills when Mary saw the stranger coming toward her out of a gully.

He had not found her pony.

The stranger rode close to her, halted the black horse and gravely regarded her.

"Seems your pony isn't anywhere around," he said. "It's likely he made for that pass over there, which leads into the desert country. I came from that direction, too, but I didn't see him. He might have been in the timber when I passed him. I might ride through the pass, if you think it worth while."

Mary was pale. She shook her head with indecision.

"It would be dark by the time you got to the pass," she answered. "If there is to be no moon to-night you would not be able to find him."

She stood, gazing downward, silent, trying to conceal her perturbation from the stranger, who was silent also, steadily watching her.

"You can't stay here all night, miss," he said, after a time.

She looked up at him, searchingly.

His gaze met hers. He seemed to be somewhat amused over the situation, at her obvious shrinking from the

alternative that confronted her. He smiled faintly; there was a gleam of quiet derision in his eyes.

"No," she answered; "I can't stay here."

"And my horse will carry the two of us without effort," he suggested. "And if there is no moon and we can't risk the trail without running a chance of breaking our necks, there are two blankers in my slicker which will make a camp in the open not so bad after all."

Mary gazed again at the mountain peaks. The sun had gone down. Long shadows were stealing out from the bases of the hills into the valley. The birds had ceased twittering. A monstrous hush had fallen.

Mary again sought the stranger's eyes. She looked long at him, fearlessly, searchingly, with a glint of defiance in her gaze.

"Well," she said, her voice low and tremulous, "I think I shall ride with you."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE stranger dismounted, smiled.

"You take the saddle," he said. "I'll ride behind."

Mary stepped forward. Her hand was on the pommel of the saddle and her foot was searching for the stirrup when there came to the ears of herself and the stranger a sound that startled them.

The sound was a voice, and the words that reached Mary and the stranger came slowly and drawlingly, with a hint of humorous tolerance in them:

"Get along, you darned fool. If this horse wants to be dragged, why, I reckon we'll have to drag him!"

There was a clatter of hoofs and around a bend in the rock wall about a hundred feet from where Mary and the stranger stood came a rider tugging at the reins of a led horse.

The led horse was Mary's!

The rider was a cowboy, and although Mary had seen cowboys nearly every day of her life, her emotion at observing this particular one was so great that she released the pommel of the saddle on the black horse and clapped her hands. A frenzy of relief. She knew now that she had not trusted the stranger.

The cowboy continued to ride toward them, although he appeared not to be looking at them, but through them and beyond them.

He was a young man, apparently about twenty-five or -six, perhaps a year or so older. He was arrayed in worn leather chaps, a gray woollen shirt, a faded blue neckerchief, high-heeled boots with long-rowelled spurs attached to them, a huge gray Stetson hat and a cartridge belt which swung low on his right hip. The black stock of a Colt .45 projected from a black leather holster that appeared to lie flat and smooth against his right thigh.

He appeared capable. That was Mary's instant judgment.

He was tall, and almost as muscular as the rider of the black horse. He was not as handsome as the big stranger, but his features were good, his eyes keen and steady.

Also, he brought something new into the atmosphere. A calm. Assurance that from now on there would be nothing to worry about.

He rode close to Mary, smiled at her, offered her the reins of the led horse.

"Yours, ma'am?" he asked, looking at her.

"Yes. Oh, thank you!" There was now a great deal of colour in her cheeks, brought by a reaction from her apprehension.

"Star never strayed before," she added.

His keen eyes seemed to twinkle as they met her gaze.

"Horses take notions," he answered. "There ain't a lot of difference between animals and people, if you observe them close, ma'am. They'll all stray, give them a chance."

He now looked at the stranger, and smiled dryly. "Depends on why they stray, don't it?" he added.

The black-haired man did not answer. He was stand-

ing rigid, his arms folded over his chest. His face was expressionless. If the sudden appearance of the rider leading Mary's horse had disturbed him he did not betray his feelings.

The rider did not appear perturbed at receiving no answer from the black-haired man. His smile grew broader as he again addressed himself to the girl.

"Trailin' the reins works sometimes," he said. "But a stake rope is better—or hobbles. You live around here?"

"Near Paro City," answered the girl. "My name is Mary Calder." He had served her and she felt that she should grant him this courtesy.

"I'm Neal Pendleton, and I'm glad to know you, ma'am," he replied. He reached down and gripped the hand that was held up to him, while with his left hand he removed his Stetson. Meeting his gaze, Mary observed that the twinkle in his eyes seemed to grow more subtle.

"Well," he said, "you'd have got to Paro City all right, anyway. Seems that just when I rounded that bend in the wall I saw you gettin' ready to climb on your friend's horse."

Mary smiled, and seemed embarrassed. She blushed.

"Yes," she said. "This gentleman came along after Star had strayed. He looked for Star, but could not find him. Then he offered to share his horse with me. I was just about to mount when you appeared."

"Shucks. Then he ain't your friend, after all," said Pendleton. "I've been jumpin' at conclusions." He now looked straight at the black-haired man. Again the dry smile appeared on his lips. "Anyway, you was offerin' to be her friend," he added.

His voice was gentle, low. But in it was a trace of quiet

derision, and without knowing why, Mary got the impression that he was laughing at the other man.

Also, glancing at the black-haired man, she was aware that if there was a secret animosity between them, Pendleton was concealing it better than the other, for upon the lips of the black-haired man came the suspicion of a sneer, while his eyes flashed with the brilliance of a quick hatred.

And yet when the black-haired man turned to Mary he smiled as though nothing had happened.

"You will not need me now, Miss Calder," he said.

"Thank you. I shall be able to find my way alone, now," she answered.

The black-haired man extended a hand, which Mary took.

"Meeting you has been a pleasure," he said. "My name is James Silverthorn, and I hope to be able to renew my acquaintance with you at Paro City."

He bowed to her, mounted his horse and turned in the saddle to look down at her.

"Do not be too harsh in your judgment," he smiled.

He urged the black horse along the trail, and presently vanished in a gully at a distance.

Mary stood, watching him, puzzled over his last words.

She was aware that Pendleton was sitting quietly on his horse, watching her. She looked Star over, tightened the cinches, drew the reins back over his head and looped them over the pommel of the saddle. She patted Star's neck while rebuking him for straying. She glanced at the darkening sky, noted the changing colours of the afterglow. Twice she stole glances at Pendleton. She

was wondering where he was going, or whether he intended going anywhere. She observed that there was a strange, faint smile on his lips.

What was between these two men? Why had there been signs of animosity? Why should Pendleton sit there and smile in that strange manner? Why had Silverthorn told her not to be too harsh in her judgment of him?

Her curiosity was strong. She was reluctant to leave Pendleton until she knew what had happened.

She gave the cinches another tug.

"Get them too tight an' you'll wind him if you have to run him any," cautioned Pendleton.

She examined the bridle.

"It's all right," he said. "I've been lookin' it over."

She ran a hand over Star's forelegs, clear down to the fetlocks.

"He ain't hurt anywhere," Pendleton said.

She mounted, swinging up lithely and finding the other stirrup at the first try.

Gathering up the reins, she was aware that Pendleton was still watching her.

"All ready, eh?" he said. "Well, so-long."

She now turned and looked straight at him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm headin' toward Paro City."

"Oh. To-night?"

"I'm figurin' to."

"How soon?"

"I'm figurin' on trailin' you."

"Why should you follow me? Why not ride ahead?"

"You know the trail," he answered, smiling.

"That is not the only reason, Mr. Pendleton," she

charged, yielding to a sudden impatience. "There is a reason for your lingering here. Why didn't you ride on with Mr. Silverthorn? Why did Mr. Silverthorn say that I should not judge him too harshly?"

"So that puzzled you, eh?"

"It did. I am still puzzled. I am more puzzled over the way you and Silverthorn looked at each other! You hate each other! and you had never met before! I want to know why!"

"So you noticed that, eh?" he said, narrowing his eyes at her. "Well, I reckon Silverthorn expected me to tell you, an' I expect you had ought to know.

"Silverthorn hid your horse. He rode up, found you sleepin', and led your horse down into a box canyon, not far from here. Then he went back an' watched you finish your sleep. After that he made a pretense of lookin' for your horse in places where he knew he couldn't be found. I expect that's enough for you to know, ain't it?"

She paled.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

She sat in the saddle, trembling.

Pendleton silently watched her. After a while he said gently:

"That's why I'm trailin' you, ma'am. There's nothin' goin' to happen to you."

She turned to him presently. She was now more composed.

"How do you know what Silverthorn did?" she asked.

"H'm. Well, it's natural for you to want to know, I expect. You see, I'd staked my horse out right behind this ridge. I was behind that brush up there, restin'. I'd been ridin' pretty steady. I must have been sleepin'

when you got down here. When I awakened I saw you stretched out down here. You was asleep, too. I hadn't been lookin' at you long when Silverthorn rode up. After I saw what he was meditatin' I rode down an' got your horse."

The girl's eyes blazed. She wheeled Star and urged him forward toward the gully into which Silverthorn had disappeared. Pendleton waited until she was a considerable distance away, and then he too sent his horse forward, following her.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN Pendleton reached the head of the gully into which Silverthorn had vanished, he saw Silverthorn a mile or so away, riding steadily along the crest of a ridge. For an instant Silverthorn was visible, and then the dusk shut him from view.

Mary Calder was not more than a hundred yards ahead of Pendleton. She was riding fast, obviously to get out of the gully before darkness settled down over the trail, and she did not look back.

Pendleton's glimpse of the country below him, gained as he reached the head of the gully, showed him a wild section, featured by rugged crags, gorges, tangles of wild brush and timber. There were many miles of this broken country, already in the shadows of the coming night; and as he followed Mary Calder he observed that the trail was hazardous in many places, especially where it narrowed to skirt the precipitous walls of some of the gorges. Given half an hour of light and Mary Calder would have gained the lower level, where travelling would have been less difficult. But before Pendleton had ridden five minutes he knew that darkness would overtake them before they could get halfway down.

Silverthorn would probably get down in time, for he was far ahead and the trail was still visible.

The light held for a time. Then, while Mary Calder was crossing a small level between the shoulders of two hills, she was blotted from Pendleton's view.

Pendleton rode on, slowly, for now the trail was invisible to him and he had to trust to the instinct of the animal under him. Had he been alone he would not have attempted to ride this trail at night; he would have made his camp in the valley where he had come upon Mary Calder. He had not dared to suggest a camp to her so he was doing what he could for her without boldly intruding.

He knew, however, that she would not attempt to follow the trail farther in the darkness. Therefore he was not surprised when, reaching the level upon which he had last seen her, he heard her voice coming out of the darkness near him.

"I think we shall have to wait here until the moon rises," she said.

"That's sensible," he answered. "It won't be long. The moon rose about ten, last night. I was headin' over the Divide just before that. I camped in a gorge."

"Then you came from the west," she said. "I felt all along that you had come from the south."

"Well—southwest," he said. "But I missed comin' through that pass from the desert. Your friend Silverthorn came through there."

"If you call Silverthorn my friend I shall never speak to you again!" she declared.

"Don't like him, eh? Well, we won't slander the absent." He laughed. "This darkness is mighty thick, ain't it? That's one thing about this country. It's definite. It's dark or it's light. It's cold or it's hot. It's clear

or it's rainin'. Nothin' halfway. No straddlin', no compromisin' on anything."

Mary could hear him dismounting. She was quite a distance from him, and though she was glad of his company she moved no nearer.

For a time she heard no sound from him. Then a match flared and she saw his face in the light from it. He was lighting a cigarette, and the pale yellow glow revealed him with astonishing clearness.

He really had attractive features. There were quizzical wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, which were remarkably clear and steady. His mouth was whimsical with a suggestion of waywardness in its curves.

The match went out while she was still looking at him, but she could still mentally see him with the light shining in his face.

For she had been startled. The Pendleton who had held the lighted match was a much younger man than the Pendleton who had sat in the saddle looking at Silverthorn. This man was not more than twenty-one. His face had been in repose and she had detected the youth in it, and the gentleness, and the sweetness of his lips. The Pendleton who had met Silverthorn's hostile gaze was a matured man, deliberate, self-sufficient, confident, saturnine. His lips had been in straight lines, his chin had been thrust forward, his eyes had been cold, hard and alert. All the time he had been sitting on his horse confronting Silverthorn, Mary had felt the menace of him, had rather feared him.

She knew now that when facing Silverthorn, Pendleton had been aroused over the other man's actions, that he had been ready to deal with Silverthorn as man to

man, that experience and character were betraying themselves to Silverthorn, revealing to him the secrets that one man may read in another man's eyes. The chances were that Silverthorn had at that minute no thought of Pendleton's age. The things that he could most clearly see were the cold courage and the steadfastness of Pendleton.

Pendleton did not move. Mary could see the cigarette glowing as it went to his lips and away from them. As the glow moved horizontally, Mary got the impression that Pendleton was leaning against his horse and that he was resting his arms on the back of the animal.

Mary did not dismount, because she felt more comfortable in the saddle. She had no fear of Pendleton, but it seemed to her that the act of dismounting would constitute a suggestion of friendliness which she was not yet prepared to exhibit toward him.

"Yes," she said, answering him, "it is definite here. And cruel."

"It's new," he said. "But just what do you mean? Were you talkin' about the country or the people? If you mean the people, why, I'm afraid you won't find them any different anywhere. An' I expect it ain't cruelty as much as it is selfishness, an' lack of consideration, an' downright cussedness."

"If I hadn't seen you I should expect you to be at least fifty," she said, her voice serious.

He did not answer at once. Then he drawled:

"My years seem to have been mighty long ones."

"Oh, then you have had experience?"

"None like this."

She was glad that the darkness hid her blush.

"I mean experience such as you had with Mr. Silverthorn," she said.

"H'm. So that was an experience! Well, if that's what you mean, I expect I've had experiences. But I don't go around braggin' about them."

She knew he would not boast, whatever happened. His face in repose was boyish, but his voice had the calm and deliberative quality of a maturity long since achieved and steadied by a broad knowledge of the world and its people. She felt that any effort she might make to betray him into a fatuous utterance would be futile.

Sitting there in the darkness she mentally compared him to her brother, Jerry, only to discover that there was no basis for comparison. Young as this man was, if she were to place him and Jerry side by side, Jerry would seem a child. Even her father seemed immature compared to Pendleton. Silverthorn, big as he was, steady-eyed and confident of himself, had appeared to lack something of the manhood of Pendleton.

Character! That's what it was. Not experience, not age, but inward sturdiness. Mental attitude. Mental training, whether by experience or observation. The deliberate rejection of all unworthy impulses, an imperturbability cultivated by a conviction that a great many of the experiences that come to one are unimportant.

Pendleton would never betray excitement. Passion would grip him, but he would not reveal it by his actions. He was a great deal like Daniel Blackburn.

Like herself!

Pendleton pinched out the fire of the cigarette.

"What were you doin' in the valley?" he asked.

"Just riding there."

"It's a mighty pretty place to look at. You ride there often?"

"Once in a while. Only—only when I want to be alone."

He laughed lowly.

"You get those spells, too, eh? Some folks can't stand it. I expect that's because they don't admire their own company any."

"I had never thought of that."

"You were tired when you got to the valley. Must have been to take a chance on sleepin' like that. I take it Paro City is a considerable distance from here."

"Not so far. About twenty miles."

There came an interval of silence. Then he asked:

"Paro's growin', is it?"

"Very fast. There are about fourteen hundred people there."

"Coal an' copper mines near there, eh?"

"Yes."

"Cattle in the basin?"

"They will ship about twenty thousand head this fall, I understand." She added: "There were none shipped last year."

"Bad season, eh?"

"A drought. Most of the ranchers were ruined."

"Shucks. That was bad. But I expect there wasn't many cattlemen last year."

"Several. My father and Daniel Blackburn; a man named Peebles over at the northern edge of the basin, and two nesters who came in some years ago."

"You speak as though you have lived in the basin for a long time."

"I was born there."

"Not so awful long," he said gently.

"Eighteen years!" she answered.

"So you're that old?" He laughed. "An' the way you talk—about things bein' cruel—a man would think you'd turned fifty quite a while ago."

"Please don't be presumptuous!" she said.

"Presumptuous," he repeated slowly. "Oh, no."

"You came in time to be of assistance to me, but that does not mean that you can make fun of me!" she said defiantly.

"I'm havin' thoughts peculiar to eighty, ma'am," he answered, his voice grave.

She considered, observing that a slight tint of orange and gold had come into the sky.

"I detest hypocrisy!" she declared.

"I aim to avoid hypocrites myself, ma'am."

"I dislike people who think they are superior."

"I'd ride a mile out of my way to avoid runnin' into one, ma'am."

"And I particularly loathe people who agree with everything I say!" she declared scathingly.

"Ma'am," he said, his voice contrite, "I expect we're not goin' to get along very well. You see, you have ideas peculiar to eighteen and I have notions that keep tuggin' at a man of eighty. No, ma'am, if you was to ask me, I'd tell you that we'll never get along without quarrellin'."

"Oh," she said, trying to make her voice disdainful. "I am not going to make any serious attempt to 'get

along' with you. I do not expect to see you again, after to-night."

"Then you're leavin' Paro City?"

"No."

"Then I expect we'll see each other again. An' maybe we'll quarrel again. For I'm thinkin' of settlin' down in Paro."

Mary did not answer. Pendleton annoyed her. Yet the annoyance brought with it a strange exhilaration. There was something in his voice which seemed to challenge her. His drawl provoked her, yet there was something attractive in it.

He lit another cigarette. Again the flaring match revealed his face. When he blew the light out he seemed to look straight at her. His eyes appeared to regard her with a steady gravity. He had aged again.

"There's been a bad season in Paro basin, you say," he resumed. "Did your father get through it all right?"

"We were about to give up when the railroad came through," she answered. "They paid Father five thousand dollars for a right of way. If it hadn't been for that we shouldn't have got through it."

"How about Blackburn?"

"Mr. Blackburn was but little better off than Father. The railroad company paid him five thousand dollars, also."

"That helped him through too, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Did the railroad company pay anybody else any money?"

"I think not. The rest of the land on the right of way

had not been taken up. The railroad company got its right of way from the government."

"What is Blackburn doin' now?"

"He is raising a few cattle back in the hills. He has cut his land up into town sites. He is going to build a big hotel."

"Has he sold any of his land?"

"Very little. The pieces he has sold have been restricted. He owns the land south of the railroad. My father owns the northern section."

"Your father been sellin' his land?"

"He has sold quite a bit of it. In fact, nearly all the buildings that have been erected in Paro are on land that once belonged to Father." She paused, adding: "I wish he had not sold it so quickly. You see, they built a lot of shacks upon the land Father sold them. They were in a hurry. The railroad built a switch on our side. The mines have made our side their dumping ground. The cattle corrals are there, too. It looks terribly cheap."

"Too bad. Yet cities are built that way. There's always too much hurry about gettin' things started. Everybody's always too eager to get hold of money."

Her thoughts were of her father. Pendleton was right. As he had said, everybody was eager for money. There was something almost indecent about their eagerness. It was as if money were the only thing in the world that amounted to anything.

"I wish the railroad had not come through!" she said.

If Pendleton was aware of the bitterness in her voice he gave no sign.

"The moon is comin'," he said.

A golden glow was spreading over the deep blue of the

sky. A mellow flood was rising, gilding the crests of the mountains, tingeing the crags all around. The man and the girl were silent while the miracle was being performed. And after a while, when the rim of the moon appeared above the mountains and drenched the world with a silvery radiance, revealing the trail, the gorges, the canyons, and the plains slumbering far below, Mary said in a low voice:

"It is wonderful, isn't it? It always makes the world seem so peaceful. It is just as though there couldn't be such a thing as trouble!"

"Shucks," said Pendleton. "Eighteen hadn't ought to have any trouble."

"But if eighteen has?" said Mary. She could see his face now, and it was as grave as her own thoughts. She fought off an impulse to tell him what her trouble was, smiled steadily at him and urged her horse over the level toward the trail that led downward.

He mounted and followed her.

They were an hour reaching the lower country, and they were half a mile from the base of the hill they had descended when Pendleton again spoke. He was riding close to her and the moonlight was streaming into her face. He observed that her lips were pressed tightly together and that her brows were in a frown.

He spurred his horse forward, seized her animal by the bridle and drew it to a halt. Then he urged his own horse closer, until he was able to lean forward and peer into the girl's eyes.

"Look here," he said; "somethin' is wrong! I'm askin' you what it is?"

"It is nothing," she answered, averting her gaze.

"Which means of course, that there's plenty. I was funnin' you a little while back. I'm sorry for that, but I thought maybe you wouldn't mind. A man is a fool every time he talks too much, an' he's a box-head when he tries to be funny. Because there ain't so much fun in the world, after all. Most of us keep foolin' ourselves. Was it Silverthorn that bothered you? Somethin' I didn't hear?"

"No." She would not look at him.

"You sick?"

"No."

He gazed keenly at her, scratched his head and frowned.

"Trouble at home?" he asked.

Mary did not answer.

Pendleton's lips straightened. He knew, now. She had remarked that the country was "cruel"; she had said that she wished the railroad had not "come through." She had said that the moon made the world look so peaceful that it seemed there couldn't be any "trouble." Trouble, to her, could mean only one thing, that affairs in her father's house were not progressing as they should.

It couldn't be money, for it had not been long since her father had received payment for his land from the railroad company. It might be dissension between her parents; it might be that she wasn't receiving proper treatment. He rather thought it was too much money, for her words: "I wish the railroad had not come through," indicated that the coming of the railroad had inaugurated the trouble which seemed to be worrying her.

He had known of such cases. Too much money was sometimes worse than not enough money. Men lost their heads. Women became hysterical with desire. Boys ran wild. Girls went to the devil. Families broke up.

Eighteen.

He was twenty-one, but crowded into his twenty-one years had been forty of experience, of keen observation, of dependence upon self. Men did not think of age when they met his gaze, for they read maturity from his manner. They were deferent toward him because of a gleam in his eyes that warned them; they respected him because his slowness of speech could be translated into cold deliberation of action in a crisis.

He felt much older than she. Years older. So much older that when he placed a hand on her shoulder he felt much like a father reassuring his daughter. And she permitted the hand to stay where he placed it.

"Look here, Mary," he said. "I expect your trouble won't be so great when you finally sift it all down. But I want you to know that big or little, you can bring it to me when the time comes, an' I'll see that it don't hurt you."

Mary smiled at him. Smiled with stiff lips. She had almost told him, and she had vowed that she would never tell anybody.

"It was just the moon," she said; "and—and—I think—the strain of thinking what might have happened if—if you had not come. I'll say good-night to you now. Our house is right there."

She pointed to a spot on the plains about half a mile distant, where a low, rambling ranch-house sat in the moonlight, surrounded by some timber. South of the

house were the lights of Paro City, and near by stretched the steel lines of the railroad which Mary wished had never come into the land.

"Why," said Pendleton, "your house is right on the trail. Almost, anyway. I'll ride over with you."

The lights of Paro went out while they loped their horses slowly toward the ranch-house. Pendleton removed saddle and bridle from Mary's pony and turned it into the stable. His own horse he left standing, hitched to a rail of the corral fence while he stood on the porch talking with the girl.

The house was dark, silent. Mary had not been home to light the kerosene lamp, and none of the other members of the family had come in. They would soon arrive, though—Calder first, as usual, then Mrs. Calder, and later, Jerry.

Mary wished that Pendleton would go. She did not want him to see her father; she was afraid that her mother and Kerry Baldwin would appear. Later, if Pendleton stayed in Paro, he would discover what all the residents of the town knew, but just to-night she wanted him to believe that the members of the family were at home. She hadn't told Pendleton that her father owned a saloon in Paro. She was aware that sooner or later he would discover that fact also, and she was afraid that he would then lose his respect for her. Somehow she wanted his good opinion. To-night, at least.

So after a while she got him away. She stood on the porch for a few minutes, watching him ride through the bright moonlight toward the town; then she ran into the house, lit the lamp and made her way upstairs, where she quickly removed her clothing, donned a night

dress and dropped into the chair at the window, from where she could look out upon the broad level land that stretched from the house to Paro City.

She could see Pendleton riding there. He was going directly toward the town, and she hoped that he would reach there before her father began his homeward trip.

Pendleton had stirred her. He had awakened a new emotion in her—an enchanting elation. The emotion still gripped her; it would not be stilled by the shame and the humiliation of the family disgrace. She felt, too, that she had seen approval of herself shining in Pendleton's eyes; she had felt his respect for her; and there on the little level nestling in the hills she had heard something more in his voice.

CHAPTER TEN

ENTERING Paro City while Mary Calder and Pendleton were still held prisoners by the darkness on the little level in the hills, Silverthorn rode to a livery stable, turned his horse over to a man who came to meet him, made arrangements for the animal to be kept there indefinitely, and sought a well-lighted building which had an illuminated sign bearing the words: "The New York Hotel."

Before entering the door of the hotel Silverthorn paused on the gravel sidewalk in front of the building and deliberately scrutinized the town.

Except for a small office with one window, where a telegrapher in his shirt sleeves was working at his instrument in the light of a kerosene lamp, the railroad station was dark. It was a long and a low building with a wide wooden platform running along its front to the steel rails that skirted it. Eastward from the station was the water tower and a tool shack. Westward were three other buildings that evidently belonged to the railroad company, for they were painted a bright red, like the station, and were glaringly visible in the strong moonlight. Mounds of crates and boxes were scattered along the station platform.

A switch ran along the main tracks, extending westward perhaps a mile. Down that way were huge piles of coal and ore. Small boxlike buildings which Silverthorn

surmised were yard offices, were scattered here and there among the mounds of coal and ore. Close to the railroad tracks was a grain elevator with a huge sign along its eaves, facing the tracks. Farther down, distinct in the moonlight, were cattle corrals and shipping pens. Beginning at the grain elevator, Paro's buildings stretched eastward along the railroad track in a straight line. A space, which one day perhaps would be a street, paralleled buildings and tracks. The space was cindered immediately in front of the railroad station, and as the cinders were cut deeply by wagon tracks, Silverthorn got the impression that this was where the railroad company unloaded its cars. There were no cars standing on the siding now, and Silverthorn observed that planks were laid between the rails from the switch to the station platform, forming a runway for hand trucks.

Paro's buildings were of the type which may be quickly erected. Nearly all were one story in height and constructed of rough boards running perpendicularly, with battens over the joints. Most of them were bleached white by the elements, but there were a few which had been painted in lurid colours, and these glared in the moonlight.

A few of the buildings had flimsy porches built on their fronts. These porches, which were also constructed of boards with slender columns resting on the ground, extended over the sidewalk. In front of nearly every building was a hitching rack, and when Silverthorn was taking in Paro's dimensions there were a number of horses hitched to the rails at various places. Walking slowly down the street, Silverthorn came to an open space between two buildings, where a number of buggies

and light wagons stood, with horses hitched to them. The vehicles were interesting to Silverthorn only because they, together with the horses hitched to the racks in front of the buildings, gave him an idea of the number of Paro's nightly visitors.

There were several saloons besides the Gold Coin, but the latter appeared to be doing nearly all of the business. The Gold Coin looked prosperous, while the others seemed cheap. Silverthorn was interested in a big frame building adjoining the Gold Coin on the east. The structure was vacant, dark, yet Silverthorn felt that if it were illuminated it would be fully as imposing as its brick neighbour.

Silverthorn went eastward until he reached the Palace Dance Hall, where he halted, peered in through the open doorway at the dancers that were whirling around the polished floor, and listened for a little while to the music which floated out the various doors and windows.

Presently Silverthorn went around to the east side of the building, travelling a board walk that led to a side porch well toward the rear. When he entered the dance hall he found himself behind the stand upon which the musicians were sitting. He was concealed from the crowd in the dance hall by a fringe of artificial palms that graced the top rail of a balustrade. An open door through which a light shone was in front of him, and he walked to it and stood in the opening.

He found himself gazing into a room which was luxuriously furnished. A big lamp swung from the centre of the ceiling, and directly under the lamp sat a big man in a heavy chair, looking straight at Silverthorn.

"Hello, Jim!" said the big man. "Come in. I expected you sooner."

Silverthorn entered and dropped into a chair facing the big man. He smiled.

"Held up a few hours," he said, answering the other man's question. He smiled again. "Kerry Baldwin seems to have started a gold mine. Is it filled like this every night?" He nodded his head toward the dance hall, from whence came the strains of music and the rhythmic slithering of feet on the smooth floor.

"It's great!" declared Baldwin. "These rubes are crazy for dancing."

"No laws yet, eh?"

Baldwin laughed.

"Laws, hell!" he said. "Everybody here is so excited that nobody has time to think about laws."

"Judge Noble here?"

"Been here a month."

"All fixed up with the Governor?"

Baldwin nodded. "No trouble there," he added. "Bill knows a good thing!"

"You bought that building for me? The one you wrote about? The next one east of the Gold Coin?"

"That transaction is old," smiled Baldwin. "Open up whenever you are ready."

"Stuff ought to be here," said Silverthorn. "It was shipped on the twentieth. New." He leaned back comfortably.

"Drink?" invited Baldwin. Then he smiled. "Forgot you never touch it." He permitted his gaze to rove slowly over Silverthorn. "Still the same old smooth article," he added admiringly. "Jim, you look like a

United States Senator, a capitalist, a prosperous criminal lawyer—anything but a gambler!"

"You forget I never appear in that character," suggested Silverthorn. "Lee King will run things here for me."

"Wise," said Baldwin gently. "You merely own the building. You never play. Well, you're right, I suppose —if you can trust King."

Silverthorn looked straight at Baldwin. "Men I trust never betray me, Kerry," he said softly.

"Well, they don't stay around long if they do. I know that!" declared Baldwin.

"Who is the big man here?" asked Silverthorn.

"Well, Simeon Calder makes the most noise. He has the most money, too, so far as that goes."

"Calder owns the Gold Coin?"

Baldwin nodded. "He also owned all the land that's been built on here. He's got several hundred acres left. He drinks pretty heavy."

"Friend of yours?"

Baldwin's face reddened. It held its colour when he observed that Silverthorn was watching him closely.

"Yes," he answered. "That is, I know him pretty well, and I go in there once in a while."

"Calder's wife living?"

Baldwin smiled, nodded.

"Any children?"

"A boy—Jerry; and a girl—Mary. The boy is wild—no good. The girl has all the virtue in the family."

"H'm. You don't leave much for the mother, Kerry." Silverthorn was still intently searching Baldwin's eyes.

"Well," said Silverthorn, "the mother is old enough

to know what she is about. So Calder makes the most noise. Who else did you have in mind when I asked you who the big man was?"

"Daniel Blackburn. Prosperity came to Blackburn and Calder at the same time. The drought almost ruined them. The railroad saved them. Blackburn is living as he always lived, for all anybody knows. He's holding all his land. He's done no splurging. He's planning to build a big hotel, away back from the railroad. There's been talk that he intends to make the south side of the railroad the aristocratic section of Paro City. He is planning ahead; he thinks the town is going to grow big."

"No chance of getting any of his land?"

"I think not."

Silverthorn's lips came together.

"We'll see about that," he said. "What about Blackburn's family?"

"A boy—John; a girl—Jane. Both straight, steady. Same as the mother. No foolishness. First class."

"H'm." Silverthorn's face was expressionless. "No law here, you say. What's the population? American, I suppose? Natives from other sections, drawn here by the boom?"

"Mixed. Germans, French, Russians; some Irish; a dago or two, a couple of Scandinavians; a few fellows from the East; some negroes, Spaniards, a Dutchman or two; even a couple of Japs and a Chink and some Greeks."

"Know any of them?"

"I take their money, if that's what you mean," grinned Baldwin. "Otherwise I don't have no truck

with them. I never could stand to have any of them foreigners around."

"Any of the foreigners naturalized?"

"Hell; I don't know. What's the difference?"

Silverthorn smiled, arose and glanced down at his boots, which were slightly dusty. The man had just finished a long ride, and yet he seemed fresher than Baldwin, who had done little in a physical way all day and evening.

"I feel like dancing, Kerry," he said. "If you've a brush around anywhere, I think I'll slick up a little and go out there and take a turn or two."

"You're a wonder, Jim!" said Baldwin.

He led his guest into another room, where there were conveniences for the performance of the ablutions that Silverthorn desired. Later Baldwin stood in one of the doorways of the dance hall, watching his friend lightly move around the dance floor with a female habitué who had eagerly responded to his invitation. Baldwin's face was animated by conflicting emotions, although among them admiration was dominant.

"He's a marvel!" ran Baldwin's thoughts. "A winner. Women like him. Men are afraid of him. He works fast. From now on things are going to happen in this town!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NEAL PENDLETON'S horse was quartered in the same livery stable with Silverthorn's animal. Pendleton had ridden into town some hours after the other man's arrival, and he had gone immediately to the New York Hotel. At sunrise he was seated on a hand truck that had been pulled against the wall of the railroad station building. Since dawn he had been sitting there, meditatively smoking and inspecting the crude architecture of Paro City.

He had first studied the sign over the front door of Calder's saloon. Its gilt letters seemed to have a sort of fascination for him.

"The Gold Coin," he ruminated, reading the sign again. "Now, I'd say that a man who would put up a sign like that must think quite a bit of money. Anyway, money was in his mind when he was thinkin' of signs."

When his gaze finally rested upon a stone embedded in the brick just below the corbelled coping, a stone into which the words: "Calder Block" had been chiselled, he stiffened a little and wondered if there was any connection between the Gold Coin Saloon and Mary Calder's mental perturbation. He meant, after a while, to find out if Mary's father ran the saloon. Just now he was amused over the variety of names that were affixed to the fronts of the various buildings of Paro.

"Lane O'Hara," read a sign that appeared over the door of a saloon quite a distance down the street. Next door to O'Hara's place was a restaurant with a name in gilt letters upon its one big window: "Anatole Lamar."

"Well," he conceded, grinning, "that's reasonable. An Irishman and a Frenchman should be able to hit it off as neighbours. But that 'Wilhelm Sternberg', runnin' the butcher shop so close to them, might not make things so pleasant."

So far as he had been able to determine through a somewhat superficial reading of history, the Germans and the French had not been able to get along very well. Jealousy, if he remembered, and something about Alsace-Lorraine. Trouble, anyway. But the Irish would smooth out any trouble, and the name O'Hara had a bland and soothing sound.

Came a few buildings with no signs on them. And then a faded, washed-out painted sign with the words: "Ah Ling" and some accompanying hieroglyphics.

A Chinese laundry. At least one in every American city. How account for the multitude of Chinese laundries? He could provide no answer to that question, so he gave it up and continued his examination of the signs. He picked them now at random, his gaze roving here and there and not lingering upon names that were obviously American in sound, as he repeated them.

"Nick Nado." A bootblack. Greek, probably. "Norman Van Zeiut." A grocer. Sounded like a Hollander. "Comelia Naso." Fruit store. An Italian or a Sicilian. "Essu Makawra." Teas and coffees. A Japanese. "Napoleon Dulat." Guns. Ammunition. Probably a French-Canadian. "Manuel Lopez." Cigars and to-

bacco. A Spaniard, perhaps a Mexican. "Boris Godonoff." Saloon. Russian.

These people were not pioneers; they were followers of the railroads. They were merchants who remembered what the native Americans forgot—that there had always been and always would be a market for necessaries and luxuries, and that the things they dealt in needed only to be shown in order to be sold.

Paro was quiet. The air was still, with a suggestion of coolness in it, and an earthy freshness that made one fill one's lungs with it. The sun was flooding the vast plains that stretched eastward from the rimming mountains of the gigantic basin, and was throwing its long, bright lances into the blue bowl that arched above. No bright lance had as yet pierced the basin, however, and the calm coolness of the night air still pervaded the lower hills and levels.

Paro had not yet awakened to the day. Few of the front doors of the buildings were open. But as Pendleton continued to sit on the truck a man, arrayed in blue denim overalls and a woollen shirt, emerged from the door of one of the red railroad shanties. His hair was tousled and he was rubbing his eyes sleepily with his left hand. In his right hand he carried a pair of well-worn shoes. He dropped to a bench just outside the door of the shanty, drew on the shoes, laced them and walked toward the station. He gave Pendleton a glance, said good-morning to him, pulled some keys from a pocket, entered the station and opened a window of the telegrapher's office. Presently he was seated at his instrument, clicking it.

A man opened the front door of the grocery store and

stood for an instant under the sign: "Norman Van Zeiut." He stared into the street, vanished, and reappeared after a while with a broom, with which he swept the threshold of the store and the space under the flimsy porch.

Farther down the street another man appeared with a pail of water and a cloth and began to wash the windows of his establishment. A window screamed as it was opened. A fat man opened the front door of the Gold Coin and stood there tying a white apron around his waist. On a vagrant breeze there floated to Pendleton's nostrils the aroma of frying bacon. Pendleton spent only a few minutes speculating about the direction from which the appetizing aroma came. Then he slid down from the truck, crossed the street and entered the hotel from which he had emerged some time before.

While engaged with his breakfast—served by a middle-aged woman with a disagreeably severe expression—Pendleton heard a train roar into Paro. It stopped just outside, in front of the hotel. Pendleton found himself alone. The waitress was at the front door, and she did not move from that position until the train departed.

"Some more got off," she said to Pendleton as she came and stood at his table.

"Some more what?" he asked.

"Well—new residents, I suppose," she returned, looking sharply at him. "They are always comin', ain't they? Foreigners, mostly. I don't know where they come from. Seems that when a new town is opened they just *flock* in!"

"They've been doin' that for quite a while, I expect," said Pendleton.

"The country's full of them," the woman complained.

"It's got so's a person can't go anywhere without runnin' into them!"

"That's a fact," agreed Pendleton. He smiled at the woman. "What is a foreigner?" he asked.

The woman appeared amazed. She glanced sharply at the guest.

"Why, a foreigner is a foreigner, ain't he? Someone that comes here from another country."

"Christopher Columbus, eh?"

"Oh, him! He discovered America!"

"Hendrick Hudson?"

"One of them early discoverers, wasn't he? Well, there had to be them kind. What I mean by a foreigner is someone that didn't do any of the settlin'."

Pendleton appeared to meditate. He finally looked up at the woman.

"I don't seem to remember the names of any that didn't come here to 'settle'," he answered.

"Some was born here, wasn't they?" she asked, belligerently.

"Yes. Do you mean that you consider the sons and daughters of foreigners Americans?"

"They're more Americans than them that just come over!" she declared.

"It's a matter of intention, I expect," said Pendleton. "The *Mayflower* came here loaded with foreigners. They had intentions. Would you say they and their descendants are not Americans?"

The woman glared at him.

"I ain't goin' to argue with you!" she declared. "But I'd just like to know how long your folks have been over here!"

"Well," he smiled, "I expect they got over here as soon as they could. And if they hadn't come at all, I expect I'd have come along as soon as I got my eyes open. An' then, like as not, I'd be one of the foreigners. An' pretty soon, in the course of events, my children would become Americans."

"Shucks!" exclaimed the woman. "You talk so foolish that I reckon no girl would have you!"

"So that's why?" said Pendleton, gravely. "I've wondered."

The woman gave him a scornful glance and turned her head. But when a little later he paid his bill and walked to the front door the woman's gaze followed him, lingered upon him until he walked out of sight.

Pendleton went to the livery stable and got his horse. Shortly afterward he mounted and rode out of town. He circled Paro City, carefully avoiding the Calder ranch-house, for he did not want Mary Calder to see him and think that he intended to presume upon his accidental meeting with her. It was mid morning when he returned to town and hitched his horse to the rack in front of the Gold Coin Saloon.

There were a number of other animals hitched to the rack, and nearly all of them were cow ponies. Other hitching racks in various places were being utilized, and Pendleton's lips curved into a smile at this evidence that the cattle business was flourishing in the section.

The street was well populated with cowboys. In the spaces between buildings were buckboards, supply wagons, some heavy "freighters." Seeking an explanation for the presence of the visitors in town, he remembered that the day was Saturday. If "town" was

within riding distance a number of cowhands were sure to have some "business" drawing them there on that day; and very often the rancher himself headed in the same direction.

Pendleton strode across the sidewalk and quietly dropped into a vacant place on a long bench that was a fixture in front of the Gold Coin. A number of men were already seated upon the bench. They were laughing and talking with other men who stood on the sidewalk or lounged at the hitching rack, and none appeared to observe Pendleton as he moved among them to reach the bench. They were in good humour. Their voices were resonant, their laughter loud. They were enjoying a holiday.

A rough, hardy, wholesome crowd. Bronzed, lean-faced men with steady, serene eyes, confident of manner. The Youth of a new country, tingling with eagerness for adventure, calmly accepting the hazards of frontier life. Pendleton knew their kind. He had been born among them, had been reared with them. They spoke a language he understood.

For an hour he sat there and listened to them, sympathizing with their mood. He heard some of them variously addressed as "Slim," and "Bill," and "Ed," and "Frenchy," and "Dutch," and "Cheyenne," and "Montana," and "Larry," and "Jeff." Descendants of various nationalities, but all Americans. For nowhere but in America could they have met on the common ground of equality, an equality that took no account of nationality. For while Slim's face revealed an Americanism that might have been traced back three or four generations, he was treated no more cordially

than Dutch, whose china-blue eyes, cottony hair and pink cheeks showing beneath the bronze, proclaimed him a Teuton recently transplanted.

Frenchy was not more completely in the fellowship than Larry, who was undeniably Irish; nor was Cheyenne obviously a native, more intimate with his fellows than "Steve," a blond young giant whose speech betrayed him a Scandinavian. Jeff was from the South and Montana from the North, yet their glances at each other held no knowledge of geographical distance.

Pendleton left them. He was pleased with them. The frontier could be left to them, even as the entire country, in later days, could be safely left to their descendants.

Pendleton moved down the sidewalk to the boot-black's shop. It was a small room with a narrow doorway, over which was placed a sign that Pendleton had seen earlier in the morning: "Nick Nado."

Three chairs stood empty. Pendleton grinned at the stocky, black-haired, dark-eyed young man who flashed a white-toothed smile at him, and climbed into one of the chairs.

"Shine 'em up, Nick," he directed.

"Sure."

Nick grinned again as he removed the spurs from Pendleton's boots.

"You cowboy—eh?" he asked, nodding his head in answer to his own question.

Pendleton nodded.

"You like chasin' cows?"

"Well, I expect I'd rather chase 'em than to have 'em chase me, Nick."

"Go 'way!" Nick laughed hugely, with admiration.

"No cow chase guy like you! You foolin'! Nothin' chase you!"

"Sheriff, maybe," suggested Pendleton.

"No!" declared Nick, positively; "no sheriff, neither. You American. No bust laws."

"Is that what makes an American, Nick?"

"Sure. Live straight. Honest. Treat ever'body square. Fight for flag. Me American!"

"You'd fight for the flag?"

"Sure! Why not? This my country. I like him. I like people. Like flag. Pretty. George Washington flag!"

"How long have you been in America, Nick?"

"Six year. Next year I get citizen paper."

"You'll vote then. Who will you vote for?"

"The best man—what I t'ink."

"Good," said Pendleton.

He sat, reflecting, while Nick polished the boots.

Nick felt that to be an American was to observe the laws of America. To live straight, to be honest, to treat everybody "square," to fight, if necessary, for the flag. He liked the country; he liked the people. What else was necessary in the making of an American?

Pendleton's own people—his ancestors—had been from the tidewater country of Virginia. For generations he and his people had been Americans. Yet they had not done more; could not do more than Nick would do should he carry out his intentions. Pendleton's people had come to Virginia from England. They were, through inter-marriage, a combination of Cavalier-Covenanter stock. When they had settled in Virginia they were not more American than Nick Nado, the Greek. Given two or three hundred years of American atmosphere, how

far would Nick's descendants go? Labourers? Capitalists? High political office? Merchants? Remain bootblacks? Become great landholders? Cowhands? Certainly, in the end, they would be Americans quite as firmly established as the Pendletons, of Virginia.

While Pendleton sat in the chair with Nick Nado polishing his boots, Simeon Calder had come to the door of his saloon and was standing there, resplendent in his flowered vest, listening to the rollicking conversation of the group of men that had collected in front of the building. Some of the men had been his customers for many months, and he knew them by name. For a time he stood in the doorway bantering with them, exchanging opinions upon various matters.

But Calder's thoughts were really upon the prospect of business. There were a great number of visitors in town, even for Saturday. The day was hot, the street dusty, and the visitors would be thirsty. Also, the day would be long, for to-morrow would be Sunday, and a late home-coming would not seriously interfere with the morrow's work.

Calder had been standing in the doorway when the east-bound train had come in, and he had observed that a number of passengers had got off. They were dark-skinned foreigners, mostly, and a great many of them had gone into Naso's fruit store, down near the ore mounds. Italians or Sicilians. He would get very little business from them. They would patronize Petrone's place. Very likely Petrone had brought them to Paro, having got jobs for them in the new mines. Petrone would get a commission from the mine owners, possibly

a percentage of the wages the men earned. Foreigners were like cattle. No good.

Cattle. The thought of cattle disturbed Calder. Thinking of them reminded him of a certain morning when the mist had covered the world. Now, standing in the doorway, he was living again in that time. He was seeing the mist; seeing a rider coming toward him on a sorrel horse. He'd never forget that sorrel horse. It was a bright sorrel, tall and slender, with a blaze face. The streak of white ran under the forelock, between the ears, clear to the poll. Straight down the forehead in a perfect square, to the eyes. Below the eyes, exactly in the centre of the face, a crescent, its horns extending upward into the eyebrows, giving the animal a strange, wild expression.

Calder was engrossed with his mental picture, and his gaze roved from the men to the line of horses hitched to the rack in front of his building. He paled, stiffened, almost screamed. He would have screamed had he not been aware of a number of faces turned to him. He must have made some sound, for now other men were looking at him inquiringly.

Standing at the hitching rack, seeming also to look straight at Calder, was the blaze-faced sorrel!

The street was gyrating strangely before Calder's eyes. He closed his lids, opened them. The blaze-faced sorrel was still there.

Calder laughed aloud, to keep from shouting the terror that gripped him. He waved a hand at the faces that were blurring before his eyes.

"Have a drink on the house, boys?" he invited.

He turned and groped his way to the bar, and he stood there, his legs shaking, his head buried in his hands, while the bottle and the glasses clinked around him. He drank three times before setting his own glass down. Later, becoming more calm, he spoke to a man standing at his right elbow, and when he looked up he was mildly astonished to find that the man was the owner of the livery stable.

"Saw you lookin' at that blaze-faced sorrel, Calder," he said. "Odd lookin' critter, eh? Come in late last night, carryin' a guy named Pendleton."

Calder did not answer. With shaking hands he poured himself another drink from the bottle.

So it was coming at last! They had found the sorrel! They would fasten the crime upon him. Pendleton! That was the name of a man who was high in the councils of the express company. He represented power and authority. He was the type of man that never gave up, once he set out to do a thing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FROM an express car attached to the train that Pendleton had heard while he had been at breakfast some heavy boxes and crates had been unloaded, and the boxes and crates were now on the station platform. A tall, slender man known to Baldwin and Silverthorn as "Cliff Lee" was signing some papers at the express company's office window. Baldwin and Silverthorn were standing at an end of the station platform casually watching Lee as he signed for the shipment of gambling paraphernalia. As Lee was to be known as the owner of the new gambling establishment the goods had been shipped in his name, and Silverthorn intended to be careful that no one should suspect him as the actual owner. Therefore, though he was interested in the shipment he did not permit his interest to become visible to any who might be watching him.

Yet Silverthorn was not giving his entire attention to the crates and boxes. He and Baldwin had been standing on the station platform for a considerable time before the arrival of the train. They had been crossing the street from the "Palace" at about the instant that Pendleton had left the platform to cross to the restaurant where he had breakfasted. They had observed him enter, emerge, walk to the livery stable and come out to mount his horse and ride out of town.

They saw Pendleton enter town again, ride his horse to the hitching rack in front of the Gold Coin, dismount, join the group of cowboys in front of the building, observed him presently move away and enter Nick Nado's shoe-shining establishment. They had seen Simeon Calder come to the door of his saloon, had observed that some terrific emotion had gripped him, whitening his florid face. After the cowboys had filed into the saloon at Calder's invitation, Silverthorn looked sidelong at Baldwin.

"That big man is Calder, I suppose?"

"Correct."

"Saw something that scared him. Notice his eyes? What was he looking at?"

"I couldn't decide. Went white, didn't he? Curious guy, Calder. Loud mouth. Rollin' in money, though."

Silverthorn did not comment upon Baldwin's statement. His gaze had gone to the western edge of town, where a wagon road, after angling off southward past the Blackburn ranch-house, merged with Paro's one street down beyond the collection of shanties, ore mounds, cattle corrals and refuse dumps that distinguished the foreign settlement.

A rider was coming along the road at a distance of perhaps a mile from the edge of town; and Silverthorn had already observed that the rider was a woman.

"One of the Blackburns, eh?" he asked Baldwin.

"Jane," answered Baldwin. "She don't come to town often, but when she does we all set up an' take notice."

"H'm," said Silverthorn. "How much notice does she take of you?" He smiled. "I mean nothing personal, of course."

"Not any," replied Baldwin. "So far as Jane Blackburn is concerned the people of this town don't count. She speaks to some people, of course, but there don't anybody try to get familiar with her."

By this time Lee and the station agent, together with two other men who had come from the Palace, had trucked the shipment of crates and boxes into the front door of the building adjoining the Cold Coin. The station agent had come back to the station while Lee and the other men were opening the crates and boxes after having closed and locked the front door with the obvious purpose of preventing the curious from entering.

Silverthorn kept his gaze upon Jane Blackburn, who finally reached Paro's street and loped her horse slowly into town.

Baldwin was quietly and slyly smiling his knowledge of Silverthorn's interest in the girl, who rode to a hitching rack in front of a store near Nado's shoe-shining parlour, dismounted, tied the animal and stood for an instant gazing about her.

Jane Blackburn, Silverthorn observed, was beautiful. Watching her, Silverthorn drew a deep breath.

"Kerry," he said shortly to Baldwin, his eyes gleaming: "I'm starting something."

"I knew you wouldn't be here long before you did," grinned Baldwin. "You're such a son of a gun!"

Baldwin was aware that behind Silverthorn's decision to "start something" was a sudden, flaming passion for Jane Blackburn. Watching Silverthorn closely he observed that the latter's cheeks had paled and that the muscles of his face had set. Yes, Silverthorn was about

to start something, and when Silverthorn got started there was no stopping him.

Jane Blackburn had gone into a store. The cowboys who had accepted Calder's invitation were still inside the Gold Coin. There were few people on the street.

"This town isn't organized yet, Baldwin?" asked Silverthorn.

"They've voted to make a village out of it!"

"Who has?"

"Most of the people. Jim Temple and a lot of his friends started it."

"Who is Jim Temple?"

"Well—he's a sort of leader here. Owns a mine, a store and quite a bit of property. That's him standin' over there in front of Napoleon Dulat's gun store."

Silverthorn looked keenly at the man Baldwin indicated.

Temple was a man of medium size. He was broad of shoulder, compactly built, and prosperous-looking. He was facing the two men who were discussing him, and they observed that his heavy, drooping moustache was gray and that there were lines of age in his face.

"Has the charter been granted yet?" asked Silverthorn.

"Nope. It's been applied for. Maybe it'll be months gettin' here. They don't hurry about such things. A lot of red tape to be unwound."

"I see. There will probably be an election this fall. Meantime things will be pretty much up in the air. Who is running things right now?"

"Well—Temple, you might say. There's some Regulators. Temple is headin' them. There's been some talk

that Temple, as Chairman of the Committee, has asked that the County appoint a marshal for Paro City."

"Did he make any recommendations?"

"Not that I know of."

"All right," said Silverthorn shortly. "Duck over into your joint and tell Dakota Slim to slip down the street to where Jane Blackburn has her horse tied. Tell Slim to hang around the horse until Jane Blackburn comes out. If she has bought something in the store Slim is to take it away from her. If she doesn't buy anything he's to keep her from unhitching her horse."

"But——"

"Hustle!"

Amazed, his face paling, Baldwin hurried across the street. Silverthorn watched him for an instant, then left the station platform, crossed the street farther down, stopped in front of the store which Jane Blackburn had entered, turned his back to the window, lit a cigar and stood, seeming idly to survey the town.

Jim Temple was perhaps a hundred feet from him. Farther down the street were several other men. Westward, among the shanties in that direction, was a crowd of foreigners. They were shouting and gesticulating after their manner when in groups, and Silverthorn paid no attention to them. If there was to be any interference with his plans it would come from some of the natives, or from the cowboys who had followed Calder into the latter's saloon. Jim Temple might interfere, but not the foreigners.

In fact, Silverthorn anticipated no interference whatever. For Dakota Slim, the man he had sent for, was a notorious gunfighter who had been in Paro City long

enough to convince the town's inhabitants that he was not to be trifled with. Baldwin had told Silverthorn that even the Regulators were reluctant to warn Dakota Slim officially to leave town. Silverthorn had asked Baldwin various questions last night about the gunfighter, and later in the evening he had sought out the man for the purpose of having a confidential talk with him. Silverthorn had disclosed nothing of his plans to Dakota Slim, but he knew that the gunfighter would interpret Baldwin's message to mean that Silverthorn now had need of his services.

Silverthorn meant to bring about Blackburn's death. He had never met the man and had no desire to meet him. To him Blackburn was merely an obstacle that must be removed in order to permit with greater safety the looting of the man's holdings. He was convinced that since Blackburn had been courageous enough to endure the hardships and danger incidental to settling in a section of wilderness he would prove to be sufficiently courageous to resent in person an indignity offered his daughter. Jane Blackburn would return to her father to relate the story of Dakota Slim's attack upon her, and Blackburn would seek out the gunfighter, meditating violence. Dakota Slim would kill Blackburn.

Silverthorn's cigar was half smoked. Jim Temple still stood in front of a building eastward. Farther eastward was still the group of men in front of a store. Westward, far down the street, was still the group of foreigners, shouting and gesticulating. Here and there at the hitching racks in front of buildings stood horses swishing their tails impatiently at flies. There came from the Gold Coin Saloon the hum of voices, the clinking of glasses.

Inside the store Silverthorn could hear Jane Blackburn talking to the proprietor. Twice he turned so that he could look into the store at her, and each time he flushed at sight of her beauty.

He began to grow impatient. Half a dozen times he glanced eastward, from which direction Dakota Slim would come, and each time he frowned. But at last he observed a man step down from the doorway of the Palace, pause momentarily, and then walk toward him.

He turned his head to see if there had come any change in the scene, and when he observed that there was apparently to be no interference, he smiled and resumed smoking.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DAKOTA SLIM was exceedingly slender, but lithe and active. His attire was similar to that worn by the other cowboys who came, periodically, to Paro, and yet there was a difference. The riders who came in from the various ranches to spend a night in town were certain to exhibit some visible evidence of their trade. To be sure most of them sought to appear at their best for the visit—"slicking up for town"—in their vernacular; which meant that they had washed and donned their best raiment for the occasion. But their "best" was not likely to be new or good, since their clothing was worn for service and not for appearance. The clean shirt was apt to be a threadbare garment, the pants much wrinkled from being carelessly stored, the Stetson would usually be the one which was worn every day, and the boots, while they might be polished, were not likely to be perfect. Some riders came to town wearing chaps, while others affected no covering whatever for their "pants." But all bore traces of their contact with the labour of their trade.

Dakota Slim was immaculate. The woollen shirt he wore was new and of good material; his chaps were a trifle worn, but kept pliable by oiling and rubbing; his broad felt hat was clean and of its original shape; his boots were almost new and highly polished; he wore light-weight spurs which jingled musically as he walked.

Everything about Dakota Slim was immaculate, indicating a nature somewhat fastidious. Even his six-shooters, reposing in serviceable holsters hanging well down upon his thighs, were of better quality than those worn by the visitors in from the ranges. The butts of Dakota Slim's guns were in plain view, disclosing their pearl-handled plates, while the holsters themselves were flapless, indicating with sinister suggestion that Dakota often found use for them.

Dakota's face was long in spite of the fact that he kept his hat pulled well down over his forehead. His cheek bones were high, the bridge of his nose prominent, his eyes deep set; his teeth, especially the upper ones, were large and protruding, so that it seemed the upper lip could not cover them. Even when Dakota's mouth was in repose he appeared to be grinning.

Dakota Slim's appearance in Paro City about six months before had been followed by a killing in which Dakota played the rôle of survivor. His victim had been observed to try to draw his weapon with the ostensible purpose of shooting Dakota, but Dakota had shot first. Dakota was exonerated by the witnesses of the affair, but there were whispers to the effect that Dakota was a professional gunman with a record. And thereafter the citizens of the town kept out of Dakota's way as much as possible.

The group of men far up the street ceased talking as Dakota passed. And not a man turned to look at him until he was well out of range. Jim Temple became rigid as Dakota neared him, merely nodding as the gunfighter passed. But Dakota's prominent teeth flashed his derision and contempt.

Dakota Slim knew Jane Blackburn. Several times he had met her in Paro. The first time she met him she had looked at him twice—once casually, as any woman will glance at a man who passes her; the second time she looked to see if his smile was meant for her. She decided that the smile was the set expression of his face, and thereafter if she did any looking at him at all, she observed him from a distance.

Perceiving that Jane Blackburn avoided looking at him, Dakota Slim correctly surmised that the girl did not like him. He did not resent that, for he had found few women who liked him. However, there had always been in Dakota's mind a satanic impulse to annoy the girl for ignoring him, and to-day he was to have an opportunity to put the impulse into action.

He knew what the consequences would be; he was completely aware of what Silverthorn wanted of him. He knew Blackburn. Like Jane, Blackburn had always avoided him. He'd be glad to "get even" with both of them.

He walked more slowly after passing Temple. He sauntered past Nick Nado's shoe-shining parlour, moved to the edge of the sidewalk and spat, glancing at Silverthorn out of the corners of his eyes to observe if there was anything to be added to his instructions. Apparently he was to go ahead as originally directed, for Silverthorn did not look toward him, was obviously ignoring him.

Dakota moved to the hitching rack where Jane's horse was tied. He leaned against the rack while letting a slow glance rove up and down the street to see if he was watched. Jim Temple was looking at him, but as he

turned his head Temple looked away. Temple wouldn't interfere, no matter what happened. The other men in the group would be too busy talking to see what was happening; and they would continue to be busy, well knowing the danger of "Butting into his game." They were all afraid of him.

He toyed with the reins of Jane's horse, leaning against them so that when Jane came out to untie them she would be forced to speak to him, if only to ask him to move. He was still fingering the reins when he heard a step behind him, heard a quiet voice close to him.

"Will you step aside, please? I want to untie my horse."

He turned, without moving, to look into Jane's face.

Silverthorn had already looked, and his pulse had leaped. He has seen just what Dakota was seeing—a tall, beautiful girl with clear, steady eyes.

Jane's cheeks were at that instant slightly flushed. She had looked at Silverthorn swiftly when emerging from the store, and though her glance had lingered only momentarily, she had caught the intent gleam in his eyes—a gleam of intense interest which casualness could not veil. And now Dakota was looking at her impudently, and evidently did not intend to move.

"You sayin' somethin' to me, Jane?" asked Dakota.

Jane's face was now pale. She repeated her request and this time her voice had an edge of coldness in it.

Dakota turned, placed his back against the knotted reins.

"What's your hurry?" he interrogated. "You ain't been in town ten minutes, an' now you're wantin' to slope!" He grinned insolently at her. "What's that you

got in that box?" he asked, reaching for a parcel she carried.

Jane slapped him, the palm of her right hand striking his cheek with stinging force.

The blow was unexpected. Strangely, until now, Dakota had not felt that Jane was a girl who would betray spirit in such an amazing manner. He had considered her a demure girl, with exaggerated ideas of her own importance, who would accept insult calmly and afterward cry over it.

In Dakota's amazement was a sudden, leaping rage, the passion of the killer. His hands same up, gripping the girl's shoulders; his fingers sank into her flesh as he shook her; his eyes were ablaze with malevolence.

The parcel dropped from Jane's hands.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in agony.

In the silence which followed Jane's exclamation of protest a pair of spurs jingled musically as a human figure projected itself from the open doorway of Nick Nado's shoe-shining parlour. There was a scuffle at the hitching rail, a volcano of erupting dust which momentarily hid Jane and Dakota Slim and the man who had leaped out of Nado's place. Then the dust settled.

Jane had been thrown away from the rail. She now stood near the centre of the sidewalk. Pendleton stood within three or four paces of Dakota, who was doubled over the hitching rail, his head and shoulders hanging over the outside, the rest of his body sagging inside. From where Jane stood she could see one side of Dakota's face. His lips were macerated and were drooling blood; his eyes were glazed like those of a drunken

man. Jane had heard the blow but had not seen it. Her parcel lay where she had dropped it. She was confused and terror-stricken over what had happened, but she vaguely realized that people were running toward her from all directions, that Jim Temple was shouting as he came forward; that the big, handsome man who had been standing in front of the store and who had looked at her so intently as she had passed him, was taking hold of her arm and was speaking to her. She felt he was seeking to take her away somewhere, perhaps back into the store, for he was endeavouring to draw her in that direction.

But Jane was in the grip of a dread fascination, and her muscles refused to respond, though she shook the big man's hand off and stood, pale and frightened, watching Pendleton and Dakota.

A strange, unearthly calm had come into the atmosphere of the street. As she stood there, amazed and wondering, she saw that people were no longer running, but were standing motionless at various distances as if they had suddenly been turned into statues.

Dakota was slowly lifting himself from the rail over which he had been draped. In the strange silence which had suddenly enveloped the street she heard an oath break from his crushed lips as he steadied himself by leaning against the hitching rail and seemed to try to clear his vision.

She observed that Pendleton had backed away from Dakota, and away from her. He was standing motionless, facing Dakota, his arms hanging stiffly at his sides, his shoulders thrown forward a little. His lips were

in straight lines. Not a muscle of his face moved.

A dozen men were crowding the door of the Gold Coin. They too, were motionless, though in the unreal silence voices reached the girl's ears, voices that insistently and impatiently called "Get back! Get back! You're in line! Run!"

Jane finally decided the voices were directed at her and ran to the door of the store from which she had emerged a few minutes before, becoming aware that the proprietor was standing there, and that he forcibly seized her and placed her behind him.

The big man who had grasped her arm was standing close to the door, on the single step that led down to the sidewalk. She could look over his head at Pendleton and Dakota, who were now alone in the street.

Dakota had regained his strength and his vision. He stood at the hitching rail, and was now erect and slowly turning his body so that he would face Pendleton, who seemed to be waiting for him to do something of the sort.

Dakota continued to turn. His gaze was now definitely centred, concentrated upon Pendleton with a deadly intensity that could not be mistaken. No word was spoken. Just when it seemed that Dakota was merely meditating the movement that would bring his guns into his hands he made it.

Jane caught the flash of the pearl handles, but the long barrels did not emerge from their leather sheaths. She kept her gaze upon Dakota, for it was Dakota she feared. She heard a gun roar twice with amazing rapidity. She saw two tiny dust spots upon the front of the gunfighter's shirt almost in the centre of his chest,

and she saw him go down backward, straight and rigid as a post, into the deep dust beside the hitching rack.

He moved once after he fell, stretching his arms wide.

Jane saw Pendleton walk forward and stand over him, gun in hand.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PENDLETON was a stranger to Jane; she did not even know his name. She felt that he was also a stranger to all of the inhabitants of Paro City who had witnessed the shooting, for during the lull that followed Dakota's fall there was not one who spoke to the victor. Men from down the street now moved to the scene of the shooting. They came toward the spot silently, grouping themselves around the body, looking down at it. Not a man addressed himself to Pendleton: it seemed instead that they all avoided meeting his gaze. Pendleton stood near the hitching rack, the heavy revolver still dangling from his right hand, apparently waiting.

It was not until the handsome big man spoke that Jane knew that anyone in Paro knew him.

The big man had looked at the dead gunfighter. He seemed unmoved at the sight. He turned, faced Pendleton, looked straight at him and smiled grimly.

"Well, Pendleton," he said, "you saved me a job. I want to thank you in the name of this young lady. I do not know her name."

"That's Jane Blackburn!" said a voice.

The crowd around Dakota's body had grown in size. Many of the men from the group far down the street had come; all the cowboys that had been in the Gold Coin had rushed out after the shooting. Jane saw Jim

Temple in the centre of the crowd. He grimly nodded to her. She saw Simeon Calder standing near Pendleton. Calder was apparently too interested in Pendleton to notice any other person, for his eyes were bulging as he stared at the stranger; he was pale and shaking and apparently did not hear words that were addressed to him by other men standing near him.

When Jim Temple heard Silverthorn's voice he stepped forward and halted close to the stranger.

"You are Neal Pendleton?" he asked.

"Correct."

"I'm Jim Temple." He smiled with straight lips. "Shake!" he invited, extending a hand. "I'm glad you got here in time to bust that tin-horn wide open!" He pointed to the dead man. "It's been comin' to him for a long time. Seems nobody had nerve to try it. You oughtn't to have taken no chances with him. But you give him a square deal an' downed him. I was watchin' you!"

Temple's eyes were now glowing. Everyone in the group had been listening to what Temple had been saying to the stranger, and there was silence when Temple stood erect and gazed about him, pride in his manner.

"Gents," he said. "I reckon this is as good a time as any to tell you that this here man. Neal Pendleton, is Paro's first town marshal!

"The deal has been cookin' a while, him havin' a job somewheres else that he wanted to finish. You see what happened to Dakota Slim! Folks, I reckon from now on Paro is goin' in for law an' order!"

Pendleton was reloading the two empty chambers of

his gun. Looking up after the task was finished he smiled faintly at Temple as he sheathed the weapon.

"I was aimin' to find you an' tell you I was here. I expect it ain't necessary now." He turned from Temple and walked close to Jane Blackburn, offering a hand, which she took and pressed tightly. He observed that the hand she gave him was trembling, and he spoke gently:

"I'm sorry it had to happen," he said. "But you saw he wanted it. You were mighty brave," he added. "Most girls would scream an' carry on. You did the thing that ought to have been done. You let him know in the only language he could understand. I'm proud of you."

"Yes," said Silverthorn, at Pendleton's shoulder. "Miss Blackburn did exactly the right thing." He was speaking to Jane and was smiling. His eyes were limpid. They were a beautiful Celtic blue-gray, but they held a dark, direct challenge in their depths.

He seized the hand Jane held out to him and pressed it tightly, while deliberately moving his body so that he stood in front of Pendleton, between the latter and the girl.

Pendleton turned, spoke to Temple, and left Silverthorn to his conquest, for he had perceived that the big man had made an impression upon the girl. She had flushed, had dropped her gaze under the intensity of his.

"Some guys have got gall!" declared Temple. "You'd think, after him standin' there an' lettin' Jane be insulted by Dakota, that he'd be huntin' a hole to crawl into. But he don't do it! Not him! He goes right on, tryin' to make a mash on her, just as if nothin' had happened!"

If Silverthorn heard he gave no sign, and continued to talk to Jane.

Some of the men in the crowd who had observed Silverthorn's action in forcing his attentions upon Jane laughed loudly, then became silent, watching the big man. Into this silence came a shriek of terror, loud and shrill.

The sound came from the foreign quarter and every face in the group on the street instantly turned in that direction.

The Sicilians that had been massed among the buildings in that direction were now in motion. Some of them were leaping, screaming, shouting epithets. They seemed to be massed about a man in the middle of the press, who was trying to escape. Those close to the man were striking at him, while at the fringe of the crowd were others who appeared to be trying to hurdle those in front of them in an attempt to reach the man in the centre.

It was the man in the centre who had screamed, for now he screamed again and leaped into the air in a desperate effort to break out of the press, and the group around Pendleton saw his face, his wild eyes and his open mouth.

"There's hell in Little Italy again!" laughed a man in the group around Pendleton. "Like as not they've got their toad-stickers out again an' are after that poor devil in the middle. A gang like that gets loco when it gets started. There ain't no use tryin' to interfere. If they want him, they'll get him. If they don't get him now they'll get him to-morrow!"

"Hell!" said another man. "That's Petrone. He's

been gettin' his countrymen jobs at the mines. Looks like they've got sort of peeved at him!"

If the man in the centre of the mob was Petrone he was receiving rough treatment from the men he had befriended. Yet he was fighting desperately. He appeared to vanish for an instant, and there was a terrific surging in the centre of the mass of foreigners. Then the crowd suddenly split up and a lane opened in it, through which Petrone fought his way, a knife flashing in his right hand as he leaped here and there. For an instant it looked as if he might escape. Then they were upon him again.

For an instant Petrone fought them. Then he burst out of the press and began to run toward the spot where Pendleton stood surrounded by the cowboys.

Petrone was wildly shrieking at each step. Certain death raced behind him. Whatever he had done to arouse his countrymen, he was now to make atonement with his life. Petrone's bulging eyes and wide-open mouth revealed his knowledge of what impended. His countrymen were close at his heels, running as fast as he ran, yelling curses and imprecations.

"Hell!" said Pendleton. "That's got to be stopped!"

He leaped into the middle of the street, drew his gun and sent a bullet screaming over the heads of Petrone's pursuers. His aim was purposely low and some of the foremost of those intent upon the killing of Petrone felt the sting of powder in their faces. And the crashing roar of the heavy revolver startled them so that the foremost halted, forming a barrier for those behind.

Petrone, however, did not halt. He seemed to recognize Pendleton as a friend, and he came on, against the

powder blast of the big gun, and dove forward at Pendleton's knees, sinking in the dust of the street, gripping Pendleton's legs and shrieking his terror.

The pursuit stopped. Petrone's countrymen huddled into an uncertain group at a little distance. A dozen or twenty cowboys had joined Pendleton. They stood behind him, silent, their eyes inscrutable, facing the crowd of maddened foreigners.

Most of the foreigners had been long enough in the West to become familiar with the American cowboy. The roar of Pendleton's gun had been unmistakably a warning, and the instant action of the other men was significant, even to their burning Latin temperament. They did not come an inch closer, though they still gestured frantically and their guttural imprecations were as vicious as before.

Yet when they saw that to attempt to seize Petrone would be foolhardy they began to regain their self-control.

Pendleton had said nothing. He stood, with Petrone still gripping his legs, facing the dark-faced men. Not until they had become almost quiet did he speak. Then he said, sharply and distinctly:

"If you've got a man who can speak straight English send him out here!"

There was an excited jabbering and presently a young man stepped forward. He was a handsome youth, taller than the other men of his race, and he grinned with some embarrassment as he walked forward and stopped in front of Pendleton.

"What's this ruckus about?" asked Pendleton.

"Your pardon, mister; but this man has been stealing

from my people. He has been getting jobs for them, at the mines. He has sent them money to bring them here. He has advanced that money. He has given them beds and fed them. My people have been grateful for that. My people are honest. They want to pay for what they get. They are grateful for what is done for them. But mister, when Petrone wrote to them, telling them to come here, he told them that he would do all these things for them for ten per cent of what they earned at the mines; the meals and bed being extra, of course.

"But now, since my people have come, they find that Petrone draws their money for them, that in addition to paying him for their meals and beds they must give Petrone half of the money they earn! It is not right, mister, and my people lose their temper."

"Seems they've lost it all right," agreed Pendleton.

The dark men had been leaning forward, listening eagerly in an attempt to understand what was being said. Several, who could understand English only a very little, were now shouting and gesticulating. A short, squat Sicilian with a heavy moustache, prominent teeth and wildly glowing eyes, had pushed forward out of the press and now stood well in advance of the others, scowling at Pendleton and the shivering man who still gripped Pendleton's legs.

"We want Petrone!" he demanded. "You no stick you mouth into this. We do like we pleeze weeth Petrone! Dees a free country!"

Pendleton's big gun moved and its gaping muzzle was pointed straight at the belligerent foreigner. The man shrank back against those behind him. Pendleton's voice came, slow, cold, distinct:

"I can promise you enough of this country to be planted in. You want it now?"

The young interpreter faced the disturber and poured upon him a flood of Sicilian dialect. The disturber whitened, looked at Pendleton's gun, shook his head with a violent negative motion and tried to crowd back among his fellows. The interpreter turned again to Pendleton.

"You see?" he said. "He don't want the country that free."

"No," said Pendleton grimly. "Most of them only want it free enough to take what they want of it." He looked at the young man. "That's the truth about Petrone, eh? And your people want to cut him up for it. Well; tell them it don't go. Tell them that while mebbe they don't know it, there's a law in this country to take care of men like Petrone. Tell them to go back to where they came from and let Petrone alone. Tell them to get someone to file a complaint about Petrone with Judge Noble, who is opening court here in a day or two, and if Petrone has done wrong he'll have to make it square. And warn them that if anyone tries to slip a knife into Petrone I'll be looking for him. Get them away from here now—quick!"

Silverthorn had left the sidewalk. Big, handsome and important-looking, he strode between Pendleton and the crowd of foreigners.

"Just a minute, Pendleton," he said. "I'm going to practise law here and I'd like to talk to these people."

"Not now," answered Pendleton. "They're stopped, and you might start them again. Get back to the sidewalk!"

"That's a high-handed——"

"Silverthorn," said Pendleton, "if you open your mouth to say a word to that gang I'll kill you for interfering with an officer!"

Silverthorn laughed.

"All right," he said, bowing derisively to Pendleton. "This is a free country. If a man wants to be a fool there is no law against it."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that you are unnecessarily making enemies of these people. Some night one of them will slip a knife into your back for what you are doing here to-day."

"I'm as much afraid of them as I am of you, Silverthorn," retorted Pendleton, meeting his eyes.

Silverthorn flushed, but he went back to the sidewalk without answering.

During the conversation between Pendleton and Silverthorn the young interpreter had been talking to his people, and now they slowly dispersed, muttering and gesticulating. Then Pendleton gripped the grovelling Petrone by the collar and dragged him to his feet.

"Come along, you sneaking thief!" he said. "If this country ever goes to hell it will be because people like you will send it there!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PENDLETON took Petrone into the City Hotel, where he turned him over to Jim Temple. He asked Temple to keep Petrone at the hotel until he visited the Sicilians.

"You won't go down there right now!" exclaimed the astonished Temple. "I'd be scared to. After what you done it wouldn't take much for them to tackle you. If you're sure set on goin' I'd take some of the boys with me."

"Shucks," returned Pendleton. "There ain't a bit of danger. Those people are just like boys that haven't had decent bringing up. They're primitive and impulsive. If you go to herding them like hogs they'll act up to what you're making them. If you treat them like human beings they'll grade up that way, too. The trouble with them is that our ways are new to them, and we've got to show them instead of shooting them. You've got to show them that you understand them."

"Do you understand them?"

"I understand human nature, Temple; and it ain't any different in this country than it is in any country. Give these people time and they'll make good citizens. But don't let Petrone go to roaming the street until I get back."

Pendleton walked down the street toward the foreign quarter. He observed that Dakota's body had been

taken away, that Silverthorn was walking down the street toward the Palace, that Jane Blackburn was riding homeward, that the crowd of foreigners had retreated to the spot where they had been standing when they had begun the attack on Petrone, and that they were still talking and gesticulating excitedly. Some of the cowboys who had stood with Pendleton in the centre of the street were still on the sidewalk, and they grinned at him as he passed them.

Then they silently watched him as he drew close to the group of foreigners.

The dark-skinned men had observed Pendleton's progress toward them. Their voices sank at his approach, and when he reached the fringe of the group they stood silent, their faces turned to him, their black eyes glowing and sullen.

Pendleton halted, folded his arms over his chest and smiled at the men. The youth who had previously acted as interpreter stepped quickly forward.

"We want no trouble, mister," he said quickly.

"Nor do I," answered Pendleton. "But there's a few things I want to let these people know. You tell them that they will get a square deal in this town. Tell them that if they make charges against Petrone he will have to settle with them. Tell them I am marshal of this town and that while I am friendly to them I won't stand for any blood-letting. They've got to let Petrone come back to his place. Tell them I am putting them on their honour and if they stick to me I'll stick to them, but if they harm Petrone every last man of them will have to leave town in twenty-four hours!"

The youth turned and repeated what Pendleton had

told him. They listened in silence until the youth assured them that Pendleton was a friend; then their faces brightened and they jabbered excitedly until the youth quieted them sternly. They listened intently until the young man finished, then they surged around Pendleton, talking rapidly and in various ways trying to assure him that they understood and were grateful.

Several seized Pendleton's arms and attempted to draw him into one of the saloons, but Pendleton smilingly declined the invitation.

There were no more sullen faces.

Pendleton looked at the interpreter.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Thirty years."

"Shucks," grinned Pendleton. "You fooled me. I thought you couldn't be more than nineteen, maybe twenty. How long have you been in America?"

"Ten years."

"Got your papers?"

"Sure!" smiled the other proudly; "I'm an American!"

"Well, yes," returned Pendleton, observing the eager eyes, "I expect you are. But I'm wondering what made you an American."

"Me? I like this country. I like the people. I learn right away to speak, read and write English. I read about George Washington. He great man. Lincoln, too. A poor boy, but smart. He got a big heart. He become President. Mebbe some day I get big job here, too!"

"What's your name?"

"Comeila Naso. I have the fruit store—here!" He pointed to his name which was painted upon a window near by.

Pendleton extended his right hand.

"Shake, Naso," he said. "I reckon you've got the makings, all right."

Naso gripped Pendleton's hand tightly, while scores of his friends surged forward shouting that they, too, were Americans.

"Well," laughed Pendleton, "if you learn to speak English, and you will read about Washington and Lincoln, and maybe a few others who have done real things for the country, you'll be making a good start, anyway. Another good way to get started is to leave Petrone alone. He'll be a good American too, if he ever learns enough to keep his hands out of other people's pockets."

Pendleton looked at the faces around him. He spoke to Naso.

"Ask them if they will let Petrone alone if I send him back?"

There was laughter when Naso put the question.

"Send him back!" shouted a man; "we no hurt him—now!"

The "now" was a concession to Pendleton. They had faith in him. He waved a hand to them, turned and walked back the way he had come. A few minutes later he was talking to Petrone in the City Hotel, with Temple standing near.

"You understand English, Petrone?" said Pendleton. At Petrone's nod he continued:

"Right. Now listen. Go back to your place with your head up. Your people will be waiting for you. When you get close enough to be heard you tell your people that you are going to return all the money you have taken

from them, except the ten per cent you are entitled to. Tell them that hereafter you are going to play square with them; that there was a mistake and that you made it. You do that or you'll have to get out of town on the next train, leaving your money and property behind. Understand?"

"They keel me!" wailed Petrone.

"Not this time. But if you make the same mistake again they'll get you."

"How you know they no keel me? You feex it?"

"Go along!" ordered Pendleton. "I'd take you back myself, but I'm curious to see if a crook like you has nerve enough to face his victims. Get!"

Petrone went out. Pendleton walked to the counter and ordered a cigar. Jim Temple watched him light the cigar and slowly begin smoking it.

"Strikes me you ought to have took Petrone back," said Temple finally. "That gang will kill him sure as hell!"

"Showing them that I trust them," smiled Pendleton. "They'll come through."

Temple narrowed his eyes at Pendleton.

"You're a queer cuss!" he declared. "But mebbe you're right, at that. How about Silverthorn? Do you trust him? I saw you lookin' at him pretty strong. An' there's one thing I wanted to ask you. It's this: Would you have shot him if he'd tried to talk to that gang of dagoes?"

"I reckon I'd have kept my word, Temple."

Temple drew a long breath.

"I reckon you would, Pendleton," he said.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EXCEPT that Paro City was about two thousand miles westward it was little different in appearance from Philadelphia or Jamestown or Boston a century earlier. Paro was a pioneer town no less in earnest about its future than the settlements that dotted the Thirteen States. Its problems were as many, its civic pride as great, and dissension among its citizens quite as apparent. In Paro, to be sure, there were not so many gentlemen whose attire proclaimed them. The silk and satin knee-breeches had vanished, to be replaced by *chaparajos*, the buckled slipper had given way to the high-heeled boot and the spurs, the Colt .45 had replaced the horse pistol and the repeating rifle the blunderbuss. Yet saving these outward signs there had come no change in the spirit of the people.

There were men who sought power, men who desired position. Still others were determined upon the acquisition of money.

Silverthorn wanted all these things. He had come to Paro with the definite purpose of enriching himself, and he would not scruple about methods. He anticipated that he faced no easy task, for he had laid his plans well. And yet, as he sat in Judge Noble's office on a morning several weeks following the killing of Dakota Slim, he was meeting his first disappointment.

He had questioned Judge Noble about the land

records, and the judge had looked straight at him in replying.

"There isn't a chance for anybody to get hold of the records," said Noble. "They are in the recorder's office at Lazette, locked in a fire- and burglar-proof safe. They may be examined under the eye of a clerk. Moreover, there has been so much tampering with the land records in the past that as an additional safeguard against fraud duplicate copies of the records of all the counties of the state have been made. These repose in the vaults at the capital. They cannot for any reason be consulted. You can readily see that if the originals are altered detection would be certain."

"That's straight, eh?" said Silverthorn.

"I've been telling you, Silverthorn," answered Judge Noble.

Silverthorn did not answer; he did not even look at the judge as he went out of the room. He stood for an instant in the street, then returned to the door and stuck his head inside.

"What was the final disposition of the Petrone case?" he asked.

"Settled out of court," returned the judge. "Petrone played square. Gave them back everything except ten per cent of the first month's wages. He was legally entitled to that."

"H'm."

Silverthorn went out into the street again. At this minute, if it hadn't been for Pendleton's interference, Silverthorn would have been arranging to buy Blackburn's land at a sacrifice, for he felt that with Blackburn out of the way the family would make little effort to

hold the estate intact. The wife would be helpless and the son and daughter were inexperienced.

Kerry Baldwin had characterized Silverthorn when he had told the latter he was "smooth," and yet since he had started for Paro City incidents had occurred which were endangering his calm and equable temperament. Everything had gone wrong from the start, little things which ordinarily he would not have permitted to harass him. And twice Pendleton had upset his plans.

As he stood on the sidewalk in front of Judge Noble's office his thoughts went to Pendleton with a definiteness that disturbed him. He had always been able to control his temper, but now, thinking of Pendleton, he found that his passions were stirred to the point of a yearning for a physical clash with the man.

He was bigger than Pendleton, and stronger. There was little doubt in his mind that he could whip Pendleton in a physical clash; and by doing so he would make the man ridiculous so that in the end he would have to leave town. He had meditated attempting to thrash Pendleton on the day the latter had warned him to step back from the street away from the foreigners, but he had been dissuaded by a certain gleam in Pendleton's eyes.

He had met other men as lithe and as sturdy as Pendleton; he had crushed them, had broken them. And those men had been fighters as physically capable as Pendleton. Yet each time he faced Pendleton he was conscious of a strange reluctance to take the aggressive. The level, confident gleam in Pendleton's eyes when he looked at Silverthorn seemed to warn him, to challenge him.

No; he would not fight Pendleton with his fists or with a gun. There were better ways. Yet the longing to come to physical grips with the man was strong. His hate was bitter, his eagerness to crush his enemy was tumultuous, but he would not indulge his eagerness until he was assured of success.

He walked down the street, crossed it and entered the front door of the Palace.

There was nobody in the Palace except a lone bartender who was washing glasses. The air of the place reeked with the stale odours of the preceding night. His inquiry brought the information that Kerry Baldwin had not come down. Baldwin slept in his rooms above the Palace, and he had given Silverthorn a room which did not connect with his so that neither would be disturbed by the other.

Silverthorn went out into the street again. He stood on the narrow sidewalk for a few minutes.

There was no sign of activity on the street. The day was bright and clear. There was a group of men sitting on the benches in front of the Gold Coin, but they were motionless, though occasionally their voices reached Silverthorn. In the silences Silverthorn could hear the telegrapher's key clicking in the station across the street.

Silverthorn walked down the street. He had to pass the group in front of the Gold Coin to reach the livery stable where he kept his horse, and he nodded in the general direction of the men as he passed them, singling out none of them with direct greeting. He felt that since his humiliation at Pendleton's hands on the day of the killing of Dakota the inhabitants of the town were

secretly laughing at him. He had made no friends in Paro.

He got on his horse and rode out of town, following a trail that led along the railroad tracks. Passing through the foreign quarter he observed dark-faced men looking at him from various windows. He had failed to make friends in that direction, too.

Pendleton again. Pendleton had kept him from Mary Calder; Pendleton had spoiled his plan to kill Blackburn; Pendleton had thwarted his scheme to make himself popular with the foreigners.

Turning his horse to the left after getting well out of town Silverthorn rode toward the Blackburn ranchhouse. He saw Blackburn saddling a horse at a corral gate and he rode toward him, bringing his own animal to a halt close to the other.

He dismounted, walked to Blackburn and smilingly introduced himself.

Blackburn shook hands with him.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you!" Blackburn declared. "My daughter has spoken of you. She told me you drew her out of the way when the shootin' began. I want to thank you. She was mighty jumbled about what happened. She said you was standin' there. That Dakota man must have been drunk, I reckon!"

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, sir," said Silverthorn. "I couldn't tell about Dakota Slim. He said something to Miss Blackburn and she slapped him. Then he grew vicious and took hold of her. I was just going toward her when Pendleton took a hand."

"That man Pendleton means business, I reckon!"

declared Blackburn. "They tell me he's faster than lightnin'!"

"He certainly was faster than Dakota," answered Silverthorn.

"Well, Paro needs a marshal like him! Town's growin' fast an' a lot of lawless folks are comin' in."

"Paro is growing," agreed Silverthorn. "It will grow faster. There is no railroad town within a hundred and fifty miles, and Paro will become a base of supply for a large section. There is already a movement afoot to make Paro the county seat."

"You've been lookin' ahead," smiled Blackburn. "Yes; she's goin' to grow." He met Silverthorn's eyes. "You figurin' on goin' in business here?"

"Not business, exactly," replied Silverthorn. "My profession is the law."

"Why shucks!" exclaimed Blackburn. "Paro has been needin' a lawyer! Right this minute I was saddlin' up, intendin' to ride over to Lazette to get a lawyer to draw up some contracts for me—for that hotel I'm intendin' to build. An' there's other things. A will. Advice about subdividin' my land. Abstracts an' things. Notes an' mortgages. I'm sure glad to know you're settlin' here! You got located yet?"

"I am opening an office to-morrow, upstairs in the building next to the Gold Coin," Silverthorn informed him. "I shall be glad to handle your business."

"The Gold Coin?" inquired Blackburn. For some reason which was not apparent to Silverthorn, Blackburn flushed.

"Next to the Gold Coin—east," said Silverthorn.

"That's over that new gamblin' joint, ain't it?"

Silverthorn laughed. "You will find people that will tell you that there isn't much difference between a gambler and a lawyer," he said. "The only difference I can see is that the gambler takes a chance and the lawyer doesn't." He seemed to grow serious. "It was the only place I could find, Mr. Blackburn, and I assure you that I shall not let the gambling atmosphere filter up through the floor to my office."

"Shucks," grinned Blackburn; "everything's a gamble. I reckon I'm goin' to do some gamblin' myself, buildin' that hotel."

"Not much chance to lose there, Mr. Blackburn."

"You think there ain't, eh? Well, I'll tell you. I've got notions about the way this town ought to grow. Me an' Calder owned most of the land around here when the railroad went through. Calder jumped right in an' began sellin' his right an' left, with no restrictions on it whatever. What's he got now? A lot of shacks cluttering up everything. No plan. Everything jumbled up. What he's sold has ruined the rest.

"I reckon Calder don't care. But me an' my folks reckon to live here an' I'm goin' to restrict every foot of land that I sell. For one thing, there ain't goin' to be no saloons on it, nor gamblin' joints or such like."

"I don't blame you a bit, Mr. Blackburn," conceded Silverthorn. "If I owned your land that is exactly the way I would handle it."

"You think that's right, eh?" said Blackburn. "Well, I reckon you an' me will get along."

Blackburn suddenly became enthusiastic and talked at length of his plans. He pointed out various landmarks

which in his mind were connected with his scheme of planning his building sites.

"I ain't goin' to go to Lazette now," he said finally; "an' you're ridin' already. Jump on your horse an' we'll have a look around."

Blackburn and Silverthorn rode southward to the limits of the former's land in that direction, and during the ride Blackburn communicated to his companion his plans for the improvement of the property.

Silverthorn said little, although he appeared to agree with Blackburn. Yet he was not thinking of the proposed improvements at all and did not visualize the pictures Blackburn drew for him. He was envying the man his possessions, and his brain was attempting to formulate some plan for the ultimate conversion of the land to his own use.

After reaching the southern limits of his property Blackburn headed westward, still talking enthusiastically. They rode to the top of a mesa from where Blackburn said they would be able to see the entire valley spreading out beneath them; and from that position of vantage Blackburn continued to point out salient features of the country.

Silverthorn's conception of Blackburn's character was not long in taking form. Blackburn was a simple-minded frontiersman, with old-fashioned ideas of honesty. He was frank, and his mental processes were direct.

"I ain't a heap stuck on the way Simeon Calder has acted since him an' me sold that land to the railroad," he said. "Simeon was too durned anxious to get rich, an' when a man gets that way he's got to sacrifice somethin'.

But I reckon that it was his gettin' into the saloon business that made things go the way they did."

Silverthorn did not ask what Blackburn meant, for Kerry Baldwin had already told him. Nor did Blackburn specify. He merely added that the saloon business was a demoralizing trade.

"There will be no saloons on your side of the track, I expect," said Silverthorn.

"Not a durned one! My side is goin' to get a fair start!" He looked at Silverthorn. "Same as my family. A man owes his family somethin'."

The memory of the days when he was facing ruin were strong in Blackburn as he sat on his horse on the mesa and gazed at the land which had been submerged in mist on the morning the murder had been committed.

What a contrast between his condition upon that morning and now! The air was clear now, and the vast reaches of distance revealed features of the land that the mist had concealed. Once again Blackburn had a feeling that he was gazing out over the entire continent. He exulted. This was his country—America! He lived here; he had been born here. He and his father before him, and his father's father. Old stock! Pride was in his eyes as he looked at Silverthorn.

"It's great, eh?" he said. "You're an American too, I reckon?"

"You bet!" declared Silverthorn.

"Then you know what was in my mind when I decided to hold my land. I saw what was comin'. Word got out that Paro was boomin'. Right away, foreigners began to flock here. Before a man could say 'jack rabbit' that bunch of foreigners on Calder's side had

bought all the land along the railroad an' had built them shanties there. Look along there sometime. You'll see their names on the signs: Nick Nado, Van Zeiut, Naso, Sternberg, O'Hara, Lamar, Godonoff, Makawra, Lopez, Latzo, Ah Ling! If them names mean anything they mean that Paro ain't goin' to be an American city when it grows up. Not with Calder sellin' his land with no restrictions!

"Sure, them foreigners have got a right to live, an' to own land if they can buy it. But the point is that they ain't buyin' any from me. Of course I ain't got any control over Calder's land, but I'm keepin' the foreigners on Calder's side of the track. What's this country comin' to if them foreigners keep on comin' in an' swarmin' our towns?"

"They'll ultimately run the country."

"That's it! An' it won't be America any more; it'll be a confederation of foreign nations!"

And now, suddenly, Blackburn's gaze went down into the valley, to rest upon the cairn that he had built over the body of the express messenger.

His guilty knowledge of that deed he had kept to himself. His duty had been clear to him all along, but he had kept silent to shield Calder, to keep Calder's family from suffering the consequences of Calder's inhuman act. If he himself suffered a twinge over the conviction that he had not done right in keeping his knowledge of the crime to himself he gave no visible evidence of it.

He abruptly wheeled his horse and rode away from the spot, leading the way down the side of the mesa toward the gulch out of which Calder had raced his horse on the morning the murder had been committed.

He was silent for a time as he rode with Silverthorn slightly behind him, and then he began to talk rapidly because he realized that they were close to the recess of rock behind which he had concealed the messenger's saddle, the bridle, the rifle and the revolver.

But he had little fear that anyone would discover the articles, for he felt he had concealed them well, and they had not been found even though nearly two years had elapsed since he had hidden them. Just the same it was well not to ride too close to the spot.

He was veering his horse to ride straight up the gulch when behind him he heard Silverthorn exclaim sharply. Before he could turn to Silverthorn the latter was urging his horse down the gulch in a gallop.

Blackburn wheeled his own animal and leaped him forward, after Silverthorn. Blackburn stifled the cry that reached his lips, for he saw a saddle—the saddle—lying in full view at the side of the gorge.

Blackburn pulled his horse down, permitting Silverthorn to reach the saddle while he was as yet some distance away. Blackburn knew he was pale, knew that he must not reveal the emotion that had suddenly gripped him. He rode down slowly, trying to pretend a mild curiosity in Silverthorn's movements, assuming a nonchalance which he felt would convince Silverthorn.

By the time he reached the spot Silverthorn had dismounted and was leaning over the saddle, examining it.

"What you found, Silverthorn?" He asked. "Hell!" he added, aware that his question must have seemed absurd to the other; "it's a saddle, ain't it? Now how in blazes did it happen to get here?"

Blackburn felt that his voice sounded insincere. He

saw Silverthorn stand erect and look at him, and he wondered if Silverthorn knew that he was only pretending his astonishment.

"You know that as well as I do, Mr. Blackburn," answered Silverthorn. He stared straight at Blackburn and Blackburn wondered if Silverthorn knew anything about the saddle or whether he was merely in that manner denying any knowledge of it. He decided that Silverthorn couldn't know anything about it, but he was trembling a little as he dismounted and stood beside his companion. He would have to do a bit more pretending before he got away from here, and he was afraid he wouldn't be very successful at it, for he was not adept at lying and hypocrisy.

"It's been here for quite a while," said Silverthorn, again examining the saddle. "The leather is partly rotted. Very likely it was placed behind this rock and some animal has dragged it out. Look here!" he added sharply. "The skirt has been stamped with some letters. Why, man, it's a Wells-Fargo saddle!"

He stood erect and stared at Blackburn.

"Mr. Blackburn, there's been some crooked work here, and don't you forget it! The Wells-Fargo people don't throw their property around like this! Let's look back of the rock and see if there is anything else here!"

Blackburn wanted to tell Silverthorn to stay away from behind the rock, but he knew to do so would bring suspicion upon himself; so he stood there silently while Silverthorn himself vanished into the recess, to reappear presently bearing a rusted rifle and a revolver.

There was a strange light in Silverthorn's eyes as he stood there inspecting the weapons he had found.

"They're Wells-Fargo property too!" he declared. "Now what would they be doing here?" He looked at the saddlebags and then again at Blackburn, and it seemed to Blackburn that his gaze was boring straight through him.

"Blackburn," he said, "this outfit belonged to an express messenger! That's clear! Do you happen to remember if a Wells-Fargo man has disappeared in this locality recently?"

"There was a messenger expected at Springer a couple of years ago, seems like. He never got there. Accordin' to Forbes, the banker, he was bringing about five thousand in gold with him."

Blackburn was not sure that it was himself talking. Blackburn had not expected that he would ever be caught in this position, and now that he had been caught he didn't know what to say or how to act. He could not pretend surprise. And he must not admit that he knew the saddle and the guns were there, for folks would want to know why he hadn't spoken before.

"Blackburn," said Silverthorn, "it looks as if that messenger was murdered!"

"I reckon he was. There's a grave down in the valley with some rocks piled on top of it. Most everybody has seen it, but no one knows how it got there. It's been said that the express company sent a man here a year or so ago to look into the grave. But I don't know about that. Folks said the messenger was an Indian, an' if that was so, why folks wouldn't take much interest. Anyhow, it's been kept pretty quiet. Folks think that the express company has been workin' secretly on the case. Mebbe that's so. If it is so they ain't made any noise about it."

"They wouldn't," said Silverthorn. "And if the messenger was carrying any mail there'd be less noise about it, but a Secret Service man would be working on the case. The government is slow, but it gets there."

Silverthorn dragged the saddle back to the recess and placed the revolver and rifle on it.

"They've been there quite a while," he said. "It won't hurt them to stay a little longer." He had spoken from the recess, and he now emerged and looked at Blackburn. "No use saying anything about finding those things," he added. "No use making a noise about it. What do you say?"

"I'd say that's right," answered Blackburn. He had tried to keep his voice steady, and was disgusted at the leap in it. He was convinced that if Silverthorn had been paying attention to him he must have observed his agitation. But Silverthorn now had his back turned.

They rode back to the house, reaching it in the middle of the afternoon.

Silverthorn said not another word about the discovery they had made, and his continued avoidance of the subject made Blackburn uneasy. He would have preferred Silverthorn to talk about it, since his talking would have indicated that he was conjecturing. Silent men are men of knowledge.

Blackburn's uneasiness grew. It began to affect his calmness, began to annoy him. Ordinarily a taciturn man, he found himself talking volubly about trifling things. When they reached the Blackburn ranch-house he was visibly excited, and to give himself time to regain his composure he led Silverthorn on a tour of inspection of all the buildings. All the time he was aware

that his wife was sitting on the front veranda, watching him and Silverthorn.

In the end, however, he was forced to lead his guest back to the house. He introduced Silverthorn, and was conscious that his agitation was observed by his wife, for he saw her watching him.

He was aware, too, that Silverthorn had made an impression upon his wife, for she invited him to stay for supper. He was glad that Silverthorn declined, because he wanted to get rid of the man so that he could think. Somehow he could not get his thoughts collected with his wife and Silverthorn seemin , to steal glances at him.

He rode part of the distance toward town with Silverthorn, merely to avoid talking to his wife. He knew she would question him regarding his manner as soon as she got him alone, and he was certain she would insist upon his telling the reason for the agitation he had exhibited.

He returned to the ranch-house in a roundabout way, rode to the stable and pulled off saddle and bridle and turned the horse into a stall. He stood well back in the stable in the subdued light to do his thinking.

He was guilty of no crime except that of not reporting the crime he had witnessed. That was guilt of a certain kind. Yet in order to escape blame of any kind all he had to do was to continue to keep silent.

He had blundered, of course. He could see that. He should not have brought the express pouch and the gold coin and Calder's tobacco pouch home with him. He had done that on impulse, thinking thus to destroy the evidence of Calder's guilt. Afterward he had taken the tobacco pouch to the recess where he had concealed the

saddle, bridle, rifle and revolver, and had thrown it blindly into the place, acting upon a momentary urge of self-preservation prompted by disgust for Calder's cowardice. He understood that he could be suspected of the murder and he was not going to take any more chances.

On the night he had brought the tobacco pouch to the recess he would also have brought the express pouch, could he have found it. But after taking the articles from under the mattress, where he had first concealed them, he had put the tobacco pouch in a pocket and had secreted the express pouch in another place.

He had never been able to find the express pouch again. He had been almost certain he had shoved it in a corner of the grain bin, but when he had sought for it there he had not been able to find it. There were also several other places where he might have hidden it, but though he had searched everywhere he had been unsuccessful.

However, he was not worried about the express pouch, he felt that if he had hidden it where he himself could not find it there was little danger of any other person discovering it.

The tobacco pouch was another matter, for if it were found with the saddle and the other articles he had concealed in the rock recess, suspicion would point to Calder.

He was worried about the tobacco pouch. He now wished he had not taken it to the recess. He regretted the vicious impulse which had caused him to do such a thing. He didn't want Calder exposed and punished; he didn't want to testify against the man who had been

his friend for many years. If they placed him under oath he would have to testify.

He was eager to return to the recess to search for the tobacco pouch. He couldn't get away during the night, for that would arouse the suspicions of his wife, and besides he couldn't very well search for the pouch in the darkness. A light out there would possibly attract attention.

He waited until the next morning, when he rode southward until he could not be seen from the ranch-house. Then he went westward, reached the base of the mesa and rode close to it until he reached the gulch where the saddle was concealed.

He entered the recess and searched feverishly for the pouch. He looked under the saddle, in the sheath on the saddle skirt—although he knew he had not placed the pouch there. Half a dozen times he poked a stick into all the little crevices of the place, thinking that it might have lodged in one of them.

At last he emerged, pale, but perspiring, his breath coming fast.

The pouch was not there.

Had Silverthorn found it?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PARENTAL example and perhaps congenital influence had insidiously attacked Jerry Calder. There had been a day when he had ridden forth upon the range in the basin imitating the manly conduct of his father, although even then he had fallen into the habit of talking in a strident voice.

Jerry had not been an industrious youth, and the necessity for hard work had gone with the sudden possession of more money than Jerry had ever anticipated would come into the family. He had not blamed his mother very much when he had observed her rigging herself out in new and daring dresses; he had smiled his approval when he had seen her night after night going to the Palace to dance. She had drudged enough, he told himself, and now that she was rich she had a right to indulge in the things she liked. Jerry even saw nothing wrong in Mrs. Calder's being escorted to her home by Kerry Baldwin. Baldwin was a good fellow and had always treated him "right." In fact, Jerry got a thrill of satisfaction out of Baldwin's easy familiarity with him. Baldwin often consulted him about the dances. And one night Baldwin had taken him by the arm before a whole floor of dancers, had led him to the bar and drunk with him. Not in an age did Baldwin grant that signal favour to a man!

Moreover, more than once Baldwin had quietly complimented him upon his behaviour in public places. He had told Jerry that he had "class," and if that wasn't praise from a man like Baldwin, what was? Baldwin knew men; he had associated with "sports" all his life.

Jerry's immature mind was at its impressionable stage and unconsciously he made Baldwin his hero. He had got his loud voice and his uncouth mannerisms from his father; to them he added the wise smile and the patronizing wink that he copied from Baldwin. He was an insincere young man, for he could smile into a man's face while hating him, and when he talked loudest—imitating his father—he was less sincere than at any other time.

Jerry was tolerated in Paro's various public places because he spent money freely. He was particularly welcome at Lee King's new gambling rooms for the reason that he was a steady and consistent loser who never complained about his losses.

Jerry was sitting before the roulette wheel early in the evening of the day Silverthorn and Blackburn had discovered the express messenger's saddle. As usual he had been losing, and as usual he was laughing off his losses.

"More money where this came from!" he declared to the ring of onlookers. He gazed belligerently about to see if there was any sign of disagreement upon the faces turned to his, and when he apparently saw only tolerant or friendly smiles he turned again to the wheel

Napoleon Dulat, who ran the arms and ammunition store, was standing near, though on the outer fringe of

the ring of those who were watching, and Dulat was the only man who did not smile.

Dulat was tall and slender, dark, with black wavy hair. His lean face was weather-seamed, but the skin was clear and his eyes were keen and steady with a glint in them that was not to be defined at the first glance. He had given Jerry a glance of amused disdain. Jerry had seen that glance, but for the moment he pretended he had not. Later on, after he had had a few more drinks, he meant to take Dulat to account for that glance.

Just now his thoughts were on the game. Three times in half an hour he had had a waiter bring him liquor. A high colour was coming into his face, his eyes were growing brilliant with drink and excitement. He played recklessly, losing more often than he won.

After taking a fourth drink he suddenly turned and looked straight at Dulat.

"Do you play the wheel, Frenchy?" he asked.

A civil question as it is written, but in Jerry's voice was an insolence that made every man in the room look at him and the man to whom he had spoken.

Jerry was staring straight at Dulat, with concentrated hatred in his gaze, but out of the corners of his eyes he observed that Silverthorn and Baldwin had come into the room, that they had been walking toward him from the direction of the doorway, but that they now had halted and were standing at a little distance watching and listening.

"Sonny, I t'ink I play roulette before you cut your eye-teeth," answered Dulat, his white teeth flashing in a faint smile.

"Bah!" continued Jerry, offensively insulting, "I don't believe you ever played."

"You b'lieve what you lak, Jerry," returned Dulat, very gently. "I don' argue with you. You ask me the question an' I answer heem. Dat's all."

"It ain't all!"

Jerry was angered by the Canadian's mild manner, by the man's obvious self-control. Dulat had always annoyed him, had been a constant irritation to him. So, for that matter, had been all the "foreigners" who had settled in Paro. Jerry had a great contempt for them.

"It ain't all by a jugful!" he declared. "You foreign yaps are always hangin' around. If you ain't stickin' your nose in where it ain't wanted you are standin' around tryin' to look smarter than anybody else!"

"I t'ink not, Jerry," answered Dulat, still mildly. "I can't spick for odder fellers biccause I don' know his min'. But me—I'm just interest'. I lak to watch."

"Well, I won't have you watchin' me!" shouted Jerry.

He was losing his self-control; his voice was shrill and trembling with an edge of ungovernable rage, and his right hand began to move toward the heavy revolver which hung at his right hip, in a holster under his coat.

"Dat's too bad, Jerry," said Dulat in his quiet, steady voice. "My eyes she belong to me an' dey look where dey please."

Silverthorn stepped forward and placed an arm over the boy's shoulder. Dulat was armed like Jerry, and it was known that he was a quick and accurate marksman. Still he was exhibiting no belligerent symptoms, though a dozen men saw his eyes narrow as he watched

the boy. Dulat was known as a peaceful man, and there were many in the gambling room who doubted that he would draw a gun on Jerry Calder.

Yet there were smiles of relief when Silverthorn's arm went over the boy's shoulder.

"That's all right, Jerry," soothed Silverthorn. "There isn't going to be any trouble here. I know how you feel. A man always feels that way when he's playing. Don't want anybody watching him. Gets nervous. That's a sign of a high-strung temperament. Why, a dummy could play all night and not know there was anybody in the room with him, even if there was a hundred. But a man with imagination will be bothered if only one man is looking at him. Dulat don't mean any more harm than any of the other fellows who are watching."

"Well, I don't like him!" sullenly declared Jerry.

"That's your business, of course; and I know you are man enough to speak your piece when the time comes. Right now ain't the time. You go ahead with your playing. I think I'll trail along with you. You lucky to-night?"

Soothed, Jerry again devoted his attention to the roulette wheel. Behind Jerry's back men exchanged amused glances with Dulat. Some of the men openly winked at the French-Canadian, for they knew him as an honourable and courageous citizen and felt like applauding his forbearance.

The playing went on for several hours. Jerry drank frequently and lost consistently, with Silverthorn not drinking quite as much nor losing quite as heavily.

There were three rooms in the place, and they contained gambling devices of various types. They were

well patronized. The faro lay-out and the poker tables especially were popular, and the players that remained at ten o'clock had nearly all gravitated to the other devices, leaving only Silverthorn and Baldwin and Jerry before the roulette wheel with the gambler who was operating it.

One by one the spectators that were left had gone into the other rooms. Only Dulat, sitting in a chair that was tilted against the wall to the rear of the wheel, was left, and he, with his chin on his chest, was breathing heavily and apparently was sound asleep.

Jerry had been giving his earnest attention to the gambling lay-out in front of him, and for half an hour had not observed that the ring of spectators had vanished. He became aware of the emptiness of the room when a waiter again served him with a drink; and his somewhat blurred vision disclosed Dulat.

"That damned Frenchman!" he raged instantly.

"Harmless, Jerry," said Silverthorn, an arm around the boy's shoulders again. "Not worth bothering with."

He smiled slyly into Jerry's face.

"We're all Americans here, Jerry," he added. "Remember that. And remember this, too, that the only people we have to fear are Americans. These foreigners don't get our women, anyway, because our women as a usual thing don't care for foreigners."

"Well, that's all right. Yes; I reckon you're right. Our women don't care for them. It's a good thing, too, if you ask me, for if I thought any of my people—my sister for one—would get mixed up with a foreigner, I'd kill him!"

"Sure; you'd do that. And you'd be right. But just the same, as I told you, the only people we have to fear are the Americans."

He leaned closer to Jerry and spoke confidentially.

"Jerry," he said, "why don't you kill the man you ought to kill!"

Jerry's muscles jumped, tightened.

"Who?" he asked, amazed.

Silverthorn appeared astonished.

"Don't you know?" he asked. His hand was now patting the young man's shoulder, and he said slowly: "Shucks, now I've done it! I shouldn't have said anything!"

"Anything about what?" demanded Jerry. He was now pale and was slowly growing sober with the conviction that some sort of tragedy was imminent. "Anything about what?" he repeated when Silverthorn seemed to hesitate about speaking further.

"About what's been going on, Jerry," answered Silverthorn placatively. "Now here, don't you go to getting excited. I'll give it to you just as I have been hearing it. And I know you are man enough to handle the thing as it ought to be handled."

"Hearing what, Silverthorn?" said Jerry. "Damn it, man, say what you've got to say!"

"Well, I don't think I ought to have said anything, Jerry. I made a mistake. I'm not going to say any more. Yes; I am! You ought to know. You're old enough to take care of your family name, and you ought to do it. No man ought to keep that kind of information from another man. Not when two men are friends like we are. They're saying——" He paused, shook his head. "No,

Jerry, I reckon you'll have to ask your sister about it. You go to her. Tell her that people are saying that she spent the biggest part of a night in Ligget's Basin with a man who has recently come to Paro. Make her tell you the name of the man. Then go and kill him!"

Jerry's face was suddenly a dead, pasty white. His eyes were aflame with passion. He took one long, intense look at Silverthorn, turned and ran to the front door and plunged out into the night.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WHILE Daniel Blackburn and Silverthorn were riding over the Blackburn lands, Mary Calder and Neal Pendleton were sitting upon a rock ledge high up on the shoulder of a mountain to the westward. Pendleton had come up out of the gorge that led down into the valley where the messenger had been murdered, and a mile or two eastward had met the girl riding Star slowly toward him. She had been headed northward from the trail that would take Pendleton straight into Paro, and when he recognized her, which he did at a considerable distance, he had urged his horse toward her.

She greeted him rather coldly, and appeared indifferent to his request to be permitted to ride with her.

"If you think you must," she told him.

"Seems there's no other way," he answered. "We're both going in the same direction."

"Which is your direction?" she asked.

"Why, the one you're riding, of course!"

She looked at him. Both smiled.

"Oh," she said.

They had said very little on the ride upward. Now they were seated on the rock ledge with a great section of the country unfolded before them. It was a wild, rugged spot, and the light was so clear that they could plainly discern the vast dun stretch of arid country

far south of Blackburn's land—the desert which both had seen on the day of their first meeting, in Ligget's Valley.

They saw Blackburn and Silverthorn riding slowly over the former's domain, and they watched as the men dismounted at the head of the gorge leading out of the valley where the messenger had been shot.

"Silverthorn and Blackburn, looks like," said Pendleton. "I'm sure of Silverthorn, but I'm not certain of Blackburn, havin' seen him only a couple of times."

"It's Blackburn," confirmed the girl.

"They're mighty interested in somethin'," observed Pendleton. "That is, Silverthorn is. Blackburn ain't so interested. Silverthorn talked to you since that first time?"

"No. Why should he? I have nothing to say to him, nor he to me."

"Is that prejudice or instinct?"

"Both, I think."

"You don't like him a heap. But how can you tell about a man by lookin' at him? I've heard that some folks can."

Pendleton was not looking at the two riders but at Mary, and he observed how her lips were pressing tightly together.

"I don't know. I just don't like him."

"Reason enough. But some folks do like him. There's Blackburn, ridin' with him. Now, if I don't take to a man I don't ride with him."

"I don't see how you—anyone—could!" Mary declared. "If you associate with anyone you don't like you are acting the hypocrite."

"Well," said Pendleton, meeting her gaze and holding it, his own eyes gleaming with mischief, "that makes me safe."

"Safe?" she questioned. "How?"

"Why," he said, "you've been ridin' with me."

"That was mean of you," she returned, looking straight at him. "I wasn't thinking of you." Her gaze was level and steady, and she appeared to be studying him.

"That's just the point," he told her. "You wasn't thinkin' whether you should ride with me or whether you shouldn't. You just did."

"Which proves that I had no feeling toward you one way or another!" she declared.

He might have told her that the fact that she had ridden with him proved certain things to his satisfaction. But he was too wise to embarrass her.

He liked her. Certain strange emotions had troubled him since the day of their first meeting. He had never loved any woman, and he had no knowledge of what love was like or how he would be able to distinguish it when it came to him. He knew only that he felt contented when he was with Mary Calder, that he enjoyed looking at her, that he had a longing to be with her more. Women, to him, had been until now merely people. His own mother he had not known, since she had died before he was old enough to get any impression of her appearance. Other women had belonged to some other man, or had been young girls who had floated in and out of his vision without his making any effort to get near them. They simply had not interested him.

He was now wondering if he had missed a great deal in life.

This girl had captured his imagination. She was keen, "smart"; she did not talk trivialities. She was like a boy with whom a man might "chum," for she had the same ingenuous mentality, the same straight and unsmiling curiosity, and apparently the same distinct lack of guile. Besides, there was something else about her. He couldn't determine exactly what the something was. It was a thing he felt but couldn't express. He observed it in the lift of her chin, in the oval of her face, in the satiny smoothness of her skin, in the curves of her shoulders, in the bewitching feminine softness at the nape of her neck, he felt it in the delicate feminine charm of her. Seated as he was now, close to her, he was aware of an enchanting happiness which had in it a great deal of reverence.

"So you are Paro's first town marshal?" she said suddenly.

He nodded, watching her.

"You didn't mention it to me while we were riding home that night. And yet you knew all the time. Father says he heard Jim Temple say so."

"You didn't ask me." He met her gaze. "I expect maybe I thought you wouldn't be interested. What would you have thought of me if I had told you straight out that I was goin' to Paro to become town marshal?"

"That's right," she said. "I didn't think of that. But now that I know without your telling me, perhaps I may ask what you intend to do now that you are marshal?"

"Just hang around, I reckon."

"And kill other men—men like Dakota Slim?"

"I wouldn't have done that if I hadn't seen that Dakota meant to pull his gun."

"You could tell that he meant to?"

He nodded, smiled. "Dakota advertised his intention. I had to do it."

"Have you shot other men?"

"Some."

"And yet you are not very old! How did you get your experience?"

"Would you be interested?"

"Very much!"

"Well, I reckon takin' care of myself since I was knee high to a grasshopper has helped some."

"Oh. Your mother died early."

He nodded. He did not like to talk about himself, and his cheeks were slowly reddening under the bronze upon them. And though she felt that he would answer her questions, personal as they were, she desisted despite the urge of her curiosity.

"They are riding away," she said, pointing to Silverthorn and Blackburn. "What they found apparently did not interest them a great deal."

They were silent, watching the departing horsemen.

"What do you think of Silverthorn?" Mary asked.

"I reckon I'll never know him well enough to form an opinion," he answered slowly.

"Didn't you get an opinion when he interfered with you in Paro, and you had to threaten to shoot him?"

"I wasn't thinkin' of him then."

"Since?"

"I don't know."

"Would you have shot him?"

"Yes."

She said, looking downward, away from him: "I suppose you know my father owns a saloon?"

"I've seen it." He did not look at her, knowing she was blushing and that she would not have wished him to look. Yet though he kept his gaze averted he knew as well as if he had been watching her that there was shame in her eyes. He remembered their former conversation, when he had gained the impression that something had been troubling her, and he now felt that the "trouble" was in the fact of her father being engaged in the business she had mentioned.

Yet now he wondered if that really was the answer. He had known saloonkeepers who were as honest and trustworthy as other people, and the more he considered this point the more he became convinced that something else was bothering her. She was too loyal a girl to exhibit shame over the fact that her parent was engaged in such an occupation. There must be something else.

Now for the first time since seeing Simeon Calder he gave some thought to the man's character, as expressed by the signs that were visible. Calder's eyes, for example. Furtive, seeming to search, to probe. Looking for something and half afraid that he would find it. A strange glint in them, half arrogant, half apprehensive. He had got a feeling that Calder had been afraid of him when one day their eyes had met. Yet he had not even spoken to the man. What was there about him that Calder feared? The fact that he was an officer of the law?

To entertain that conviction would mean that he must think that Calder had violated the law, because an honest man has nothing to fear from the law.

"Well?" said Mary, breaking in upon his thoughts.

"Runnin' a straight saloon is a job," he answered. "Your father's saloon is run straight."

"I know that," she said. "I am wondering if you like my father."

"Why, I've only seen him once or twice. I haven't been able to form an opinion of him."

"That means that you don't think much of him," she said. "Please don't deny that," she added, looking at him defiantly. "If you liked him you would know it with the first glance—the second surely. If you dislike him you equivocate, as you did just now. Everybody is like that—except the hypocrites. The hypocrites will like anybody they find it expedient to like. Well, if you don't like Father, you must like Mother less. For you must know about her, too. You must have seen, or somebody must have told you. She goes to saloons, to the dance hall—alone. She drinks. She comes home late at night, usually with Kerry Baldwin."

She was still gazing straight at him, and she went on as though determined to heap at his feet the full measure of her shame.

"You must have met my brother too, Jerry. If you haven't met him he must have been pointed out to you. He's spoiled, Jerry is, spoiled by having his own way too much, by having no father or mother to look after him, by having more money than he should have. He swaggers around town—here and in other towns—he drinks, gambles, fights; he is insolent to everybody.

There, I have told you all about the Calder family. You would find it out sooner or later, and I wanted you to hear it from me."

"So that's the history of the Calder family, is it?" he said. "Why, you've left out the most important part of it." His voice was gravely serious, for he saw how greatly she felt the disgrace that had come upon her, and his pity was so strong that he would have taken her into his arms to comfort her had he not known she would have mistaken the action.

"Why, shucks!" he added, "that was so uninterestin' that I don't believe I was even listenin' to it. You didn't say a word about yourself; how you've got good enough in you to make up for the rest of the family, an' how you've got more courage than any girl I ever saw!"

"You are saying that just to be nice," she declared. "After this you will manage to avoid me."

He captured one of her hands.

"To-morrow we will go ridin' again," he said. "An' if your days ain't all taken up we'll keep on goin' every day until you get so tired lookin' at me that you'll say: 'Neal Pendleton, you get on that sorrel horse an' start to go away from here. You keep on goin' until your horse breaks a leg or gets himself a spavin or somethin' that will make it impossible for you to get back here again.' You'll be that tired of me that you'll——"

"A spavin wouldn't——" She smiled mistily.

"Would you want it to?" he asked.

"Of course not."

She still did not offer to take her hand from his. And they sat there for a time, gazing out over the beautiful

land, saying nothing. But at last they mounted their horses and rode homeward.

The dusk was almost upon Mary when she rode into the yard of the ranch-house. And a few hours later she was sitting upon the veranda with a darkened house behind her when her brother rode at a breakneck pace toward her, threw himself from the horse at the edge of the veranda, leaped to her, gripped her savagely by the arms and shook her so violently that she felt her head must be snapped from her shoulders.

"Look here, you damned hussy!" he shouted. "Who was that man you spent the night with in Ligget's Valley? Talk fast, damn you, or I'll choke you to death! The honour of this family don't mean anything to you, does it! I'll show you! I'll show him, too! Tell me his name! Tell me! I'm goin' to kill him!"

"Jerry!" she cried when she could get her breath. "What has come over you? I did not spend any night with anybody in Ligget's Valley. I—I was there one afternoon and night overtook me. I rode home with Neal Pendleton, and he——"

She presently found herself in her chair, sobbing with pain and fright, while Jerry, having leaped down from the veranda, had mounted his horse and was skittering away in the darkness toward Paro.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

NEARLY all of Paro's night activity was centred in the saloons, the dance hall and the new gambling rooms, the latter establishment being distinguished by a sign hanging over its front door bearing the simple legend: "Lee King's Place."

There had been some movement in the street earlier in the evening, when several riders had come in, and when the citizens had moved here and there answering their impulses and whims. But shortly after darkness settled the street became deserted, except for a little group which had collected upon the benches in front of the Gold Coin.

There were in this group a number of those who were termed "foreigners" by those natives of the section who professed to have become "Americans" through having been born in the country—some of whom could have produced a list of ancestors who had likewise first seen the light of day in the land of the free.

It had been conveyed to the foreigners in various subtle ways—and sometimes in ways not so subtle—that they were outside the fellowship which certain of the natives appeared to have formed. At any rate when a foreigner was near it was noticeable that all conversation became at once stilted, or there was some broad if not insolent reference to the particular shortcomings

of the races of men who had come from across the water. Not all the natives indulged in these references; there were some who listened, grim-faced and silent, probably remembering that their own ancestry was not without its breaks in the crystal purity of lineage. But it was significant that every time there was a foreigner near, some veiled insult or crude jibe was sure to be launched. In consequence the foreigners felt impelled to draw apart. And so—usually in the evening—one might find a group of them smoking and chatting in the street. The group formed sometimes in one locality, sometimes in another. To-night it had met in front of the Gold Coin.

Light from the front windows of the Gold Coin shone into some of the faces of the group, while others were in shadow. Nick Nado was perched upon a post of the hitching rack, his white teeth and his brilliant black eyes flashing as he talked.

George Washington Logan, a tall, slender negro who washed dishes in Anatole Lamar's restaurant, was leaning against the hitching rack near Nado. Lamar himself, wearing a white skull cap, was sitting on a bench against the wall of the building, smoking a cigarette and twirling the points of his long moustache; Van Zeiut, a Hollander, was in the group; and Comeila Naso, the owner of the fruit store; and Lane O'Hara; and Godonoff the Russian; Makawra, the Japanese; Sternberg, the German; Lopez, the Spaniard from Sonora; Latzo, the Scandinavian; even Ah Ling, the Chinaman. Napoleon Dulat, who usually was to be found in the group, was missing.

They were talking about Dulat.

"He's go in for gamble, mebbe," suggested Nado. "I seen him go in Lee King's place. Dulat like to take the chance. He make good American some day."

"Americans like to gamble, eh, Nick?" smiled O'Hara. "Faith, I think there's a bit of that divilment in ivery man's blood."

"Poof!" exclaimed Lamar. "Poker ees not the gamble. To gamble properly one must go to Monte Carlo."

"Gamble? Bah!" said Van Zeiut. "She iss silly. Better it iss to blay de cards mit a stein of cool lager und cheese, und mebbe——"

"Beer?" grinned Ah Ling. "Him velly good. Melican beer."

"You like American beer, Ling?" asked O'Hara.

"Sure. Like him heap."

"Don't tell me!" jibed O'Hara. "The next thing you'll be claimin' to be an American!"

"Melican? Sure. Me Melican now!"

"Go 'long! You don't vote, an' ye won't be let to vote. How can you be an American if ye can't vote?"

"Like 'um anyhow," smiled Ah Ling.

"Well; that's somethin'," conceded O'Hara. "You're on the right track when you begin to like 'em. I wonder how many of ye here like 'em?"

"Some great, some pretty fair, some no good," answered Nado. "That's same way in every country. Some no good here. Some great—real American. Pendleton. He's good American. What you say?"

"None betther, me lad. If I'm not mistaken there's a bit of the ould sod in that lad!"

"Irish?" Nado's smile again flashed.

"Sure, an' why not? Are ye sayin' the Irish ain't as good as the nixt men?"

"Irish all right!" conceded Nado. "Only——" He hesitated. "Only Pendleton—he's diff'rent. I don't know how you say him. He's ever'ting—what you call? He's got in him ever'ting—jus' lak the co'ntry. You unnerstand? He's lak America. Got the talk, the way. See? He's beeg. Wide, eh? He's brave. He belong here—lak he come out of the ground."

"I see what you're drivin' at, Nick. Mebbe you're right. Sure; you are. Whin ye come right down to it, you've got sense. Min like Pindleton are Americans. There's a lot of thim, too. The woods is full of thim. But they don't shove thimselves forward like a good manny others. Like Silverthorn, for instance."

"Pendleton iss a goot man," heavily declared Van Zeiut.

"He's brave lak hell!" added Latzo.

"Gooda man," nodded Naso.

"Bueno," confirmed Lopez.

"Yah," added Godonoff.

The others nodded their heads.

They sat and stood in the uncertain light, gravely carrying on their conversation. They were outside the fellowship, and yet by the spirit they betrayed they would one day form a fellowship of their own. For they had seized upon an ideal—their ideal of an American citizen—and as the years went by they would by their deeds and actions seek to emulate him, to mould their thoughts according to their conception of what Pendleton would think in so far as they were able to conceive his thoughts. They would seek to attain the

perfection they felt was his; they would pattern their lives after his as far as possible; placing him in their thoughts beside Lincoln and Washington and the other great Americans with whose names they were familiar, believing him to be a living example of the spirit of American citizenship.

And then, while they were thinking of Pendleton, he was among them. He had come out of a door at a little distance down the street, and was standing among them before any of them realized his presence. And he was laughing and speaking.

"Talk has run low, eh?" he said. "Well, let's give her a new start! Nado, I hear you are gettin' rich and that you are thinking of buying an interest in Blackburn's new hotel."

"Rich?" smiled Nado. "Mebbe fifty years."

"Then it's you, Van Zeuit. A man never gets these rumours straight."

"Jah. I puy an interest—nein." He grinned widely at Pendleton.

"Blackburn going to start pretty soon?" asked Nado.

"To-morrow," answered Pendleton. "Five carloads of material are on the switch now. A gang of workmen came in on the six o'clock train. They are quartered in some of the shanties down the street. I understand Blackburn plans to rush the work."

Pendleton climbed to the hitching rack beside Nado, lighted a cigarette and began to talk about Paro's future. Keenly, appraisingly, almost lovingly, the others watched him and listened. Gravely they weighed his words, valued them. They were interested in the town,

for they had come here to be merchants and their future would be linked with the town's future.

They respected Pendleton. They had faith in his judgment, in his motives; they trusted him. They knew he was cool and capable. He did not bluster or boast of his ancestry. They were aware that he had a keen sense of justice and that he would be implacable in administering it. They had seen him facing Dakota Slim when death seemed to stand at his elbow; they had watched him on the day he had saved Petrone the Sicilian; they had heard him threaten one of his own countrymen—Silverthorn. And so they listened to him as he talked, hanging upon his words, interjecting a word of their own now and then in order to keep him talking so that he would be with them longer.

Pendleton was still discussing the town's future when a man leaped out of the door of the gambling establishment adjoining the Gold Coin. The man's leap took him to the centre of the sidewalk, where he paused momentarily as though to get his eyes accustomed to the gloom of the night following the brilliance which had previously bathed him.

An instant he paused, then ran to the hitching rack in front of the place. He fumbled with the reins of one of the horses tied there, got the reins loose, threw them over the animal's head, leaped into the saddle with the horse already running, and raced down the street in a cloud of dust.

Every man in the group had seen the man's face as he had halted in front of the building. And now Nado laughed.

"Jerry Calder," he said. "My, dat boy hit de high spot!"

"Heeza no gooda boy!" declared Naso. "Shoota da mout' off about 'foreigner.' Say no gotta right ina deez co'ntry. Fresh."

Nado laughed.

"Jus' lak my con'try," he said. "Same t'ing, ever'-where. In my con'try American is 'foreigner.' He come, look aroun', no speak de langwige. T'ings diff'rent. No de same. He don' know how to act. My co'ntrymen have no'ting to do weeth heem. Strange. My co'ntrymen t'ink he got swell head. Laugh at heem. What you call—sting heem. Make fun at heem. Have nodding to do weeth heem. Mebbe he get sore too—like us, heh? Wal; what he do? What we do? Notting. Dey is notting to do. If he stay in my co'ntry long enough we git used to heem. Mebbe after while like heem. Mebbe not. Pendleton come to my co'ntry we like heem. Silverthorn come —no like. See?"

"Jah."

"Ye are right, Nick. Ye've got more sinse than I gave ye credit for havin'. Ivery mon's a foreigner whin he's out of his own country, an' he's got nobody to blame that he don't get treated like a native."

There was a silence while the men of the group were digesting these observations. Into that silence came again the beating of hoofs, and this time they were approaching town. Far down the street a horse and rider took form as they hurtled forward, coming with amazing swiftness.

There was a swirl of dust at the hitching rail directly in front of the Gold Coin; a horse slid to a dizzying halt,

a man slid out of the saddle and dove headlong at Pendleton, cursing as he leaped.

He missed Pendleton because with the man's movement Pendleton had slipped down from the rail. The impetus of the man's forward movement took him beyond Pendleton and sent him off balance, so that for an instant he stood swaying, trying again to get into motion. The light from the windows of the Gold Coin shone upon him, revealing him as Jerry Calder.

His face was pale with passion; his eyes were blazing, his mouth working as words issued from it, profane, blasphemous.

"Damn your soul to hell, Pendleton, I'll teach you to make a fool of my sister!" he yelled.

He had regained his equilibrium now, and he clawed at his gun. He had not succeeded in getting the weapon out of the holster when Pendleton leaped at him, but it came when Pendleton closed with him.

There was a short, sharp scuffle, during which the light from the kerosene lamps inside the Gold Coin glinted upon the weapon. Then Jerry was down, flat on his back in the dust of the street, with Pendleton astride him, holding him there. The gun had been knocked from Jerry's grasp and was lying a dozen feet away, half buried in a windrow of dust.

Pendleton looked down at the boy's inflamed face.

"Now tell me what's eatin' you, you locoed young pup!" he said.

Jerry continued to blaspheme. He rolled his head this way and that, and his muscles writhed and squirmed in an effort to break the iron grip that was holding him flat on his back.

"I'll kill you!" he groaned. "Damn you, let me up! I'll kill you!"

"You're not killin' anybody right now, Jerry," answered Pendleton. "An' if you mention your sister again I'll bust you wide open. You came out of Lee King's place a minute ago. Who were you talkin' to in there?"

Jerry did not answer. Pendleton leaned closer.

"Silverthorn, wasn't it?"

No answer. A frenzied effort to release himself. And more wild profanity.

"Silverthorn told you something, eh?" insisted Pendleton.

"Yes; damn you!" blazed the youth. "You've got me; but I tell you that when I get up I'm going to kill you!"

"You fellows come here!"

Pendleton motioned the men of the group toward him. They surrounded him.

"This boy's lost his head," said Pendleton. "He wants to kill somebody, and there isn't any question about him doin' it if he gets loose. Hold him here until I come out of Lee King's place!"

He got up, observed how the men seized Jerry, deliberately brushed the dust from his clothing, drew his gun, inspected it, slipped it back into the holster, walked to the front door of the gambling house, and entered.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE players in the adjoining rooms had been too intent upon their gambling to take any interest in what was happening in the room where Jerry had been. It is to be doubted that they heard a word of the conversation. At any rate not a head was turned when Jerry leaped out of the front door.

Silverthorn and Baldwin stood motionless for an instant after Jerry's disappearance. Baldwin's face was pale; he stared at his friend.

"You've done it now!" he declared. "That kid will kill Pendleton!"

"I won't be one of the mourners," said Silverthorn. "You know that. But I don't think it will happen. Pendleton is too slick with a gun. I'm feeling fine. I've been taking care of myself. I want to knock hell out of Pendleton to-night. Of course, if the kid kills him, so much the better; I won't have to bother. But if Pendleton holds the kid off and finds out who told him that yarn about Mary Calder, he will burst in here, looking for fight. I plan to give him all the fight he wants.

"There's only one thing. Pendleton might shoot. I'm carrying no gun. I want you to stand right there, and if Pendleton tries to draw a gun, plug him! Close and lock those two rear doors, so those rummies can't crowd in here and spoil things!"

Baldwin shoved the two doors shut, locked them. He looked at Napoleon Dulat, then at Silverthorn.

"How about this stew?"

"Drunk. He's dead to the world. Let him stay. Wait! Throw him out!"

Baldwin strode to where Dulat sat and shook him. Dulat's body was limp and his head rolled from side to side under Baldwin's muscular efforts. Baldwin attempted to lift the French-Canadian to his feet but could not raise his body from the chair.

"Hell; he's dead!" gasped Baldwin. "Give me a hand."

Silverthorn was removing his coat. He hung the garment upon a hook high on the wall, placed his hat over it. He stood, looking at Dulat and Baldwin while he rolled his sleeves to the elbows, disclosing his great, muscular arms. He tightened his belt and was moving toward Dulat when there came a sound from the street.

"Jerry's back!" he said. "No time now. Listen!"

From the street came Jerry's shrieks of rage; his furious curses.

"That settles Jerry," said Silverthorn. "Pendleton's got him! Hustle! Roll that wheel! I'll be playing it!"

Baldwin leaped to the roulette wheel and set it to spinning, while Silverthorn drew out a roll of bills and pretended to play.

When they heard Pendleton's step on the threshold they apparently paid no attention, though Baldwin's face had whitened and all his will power was required to keep his gaze upon the wheel.

"Fifty dollars on the red," said Silverthorn.

Silverthorn's voice startled Baldwin. Baldwin had

not looked at Pendleton approaching, though he knew the latter had crossed the floor and that he now stood behind Silverthorn. Now, however, startled by the sound of Silverthorn's voice, which was low and steady, Baldwin looked up.

"Right," he answered, and was amazed to discover that his voice was high, shrill and quavering.

At that instant Pendleton laid a hand on Silverthorn's shoulder.

"Silverthorn," he said, "I want to ask you a question."

Silverthorn turned, faced Pendleton.

"Oh, it's you?" he said. "Well, if you think you must interrupt, go ahead. What is your question?"

"It's this," said Pendleton. "Did you say anything to Jerry Calder about Mary Calder?"

Silverthorn pocketed the roll of bills he had been displaying. He grinned widely into Pendleton's eyes, which were gleaming with a light of high intensity.

"Yes!" answered Silverthorn. "What of it?"

Pendleton answered Silverthorn's smile. He looked at Baldwin, at Dulat, still huddled in the chair; at the closed doors. His gaze came back to Silverthorn.

"I think I understand," he said. "This is a frame-up. You thought that if Jerry didn't kill me, I would come here. You were right. You've purposely left your gun off. I can't kill you, but I'm going to beat you up so that you'll never feel like a man again!"

Pendleton stepped back a pace, unbuckled his cartridge belt and tossed belt, holster and gun into a corner. He had turned his back to Silverthorn for an instant, and in that instant Silverthorn leaped and struck.

Pendleton had caught the sound of the cat-like leap. He moved his head slightly and the blow swished past his jaw. The force of the blow threw Silverthorn off balance, and he reeled past Pendleton and brought up with a crash against the wall. Instantly he recovered and rushed again at Pendleton. This time he moved more slowly, weaving forward with his body in a crouch, feinting, grinning.

"Good thing for you I didn't hit you that time, Pendleton!" he said, referring to the foul blow he had struck, which had been evaded.

It was evident that Silverthorn anticipated victory in spite of the ease with which Pendleton had escaped the previous unexpected attack, for the man's eyes were gleaming with a confident light, and the smile on his lips was one of unmistakable pleasure.

He had long repressed his eagerness to achieve a clash with Pendleton. He had been long in bringing it about, but now that the time had come he was eagerly pressing forward, keen to match his wits and his muscles against the man who had frustrated him upon so many occasions. That he was so brazenly frank in admitting that his first attack had been unfair indicated that he would not scruple about methods in conducting this fight.

Pendleton did not answer. He was warily watching, slowly retreating. He continually slipped his head to the left in evading Silverthorn's stabbing left hand, which the latter used cleverly; and each time he slipped away from the left he raised his own left hand to block Silverthorn's anticipated right cross.

However, Silverthorn did not attempt the blow, though he continually threatened to do so. Twice as

they slowly circled the room Silverthorn attempted to drive Pendleton into a corner, and each time Pendleton slipped away, Silverthorn following.

Silverthorn's smile had already vanished. His anticipation of an easy victory had gone with his discovery that Pendleton was betraying a great deal of skill in defending himself. He was now aware that Pendleton was clever, but he still had faith in his own strength and hitting ability, and he went in viciously, hitting with both hands.

Suddenly Pendleton's left shot out. It was short, as Pendleton intended it should be. Instantly Silverthorn's right swished across, missing Pendleton's chin by a fraction of an inch. Silverthorn's instinct to protect his chin came tardily, and the heavy uppercut that flashed to the point of his jaw jarred him from heels to head. There was a taste of sulphur in his mouth and objects in the room faded from his vision. When he again became conscious of his surroundings he realized that he was sitting on the floor with his hands extended at his sides to steady himself; while Pendleton was standing over him, looking down at him.

The blow had dazed Silverthorn. Yet in the great drunkenness that had come upon him was a greater rage. As soon as he could fix Pendleton clearly in his vision he began to get to his feet, warily watching so that his enemy might not strike him before he reached an erect position. But Pendleton would not take that mean advantage. He stepped back, permitted Silverthorn to get into fighting position, and then was upon him again, striking heavily.

Silverthorn was still dazed. He blocked some of the

blows by instinct, but others got through and thudded against him, rocking his head back and forth, causing his legs to bend at the knees. His vision blurred, his rage blinding him still further, he rushed at Pendleton, attempting to clinch. Pendleton's fists, like lead-tipped withes, crashed against him with deadening force, so that Silverthorn's senses again left him. He stood for a moment, rocking back and forth on his heels and toes, his arms hanging helplessly at his sides, his lips drooling blood. Another heavy blow would have sent him crashing to the floor.

At that instant there came a sudden movement, and a voice, Dulat's voice.

"Don do dat, Mistaire Baldwin!" it said. "Biccause if you do I will blow your head off!"

Pendleton turned. He saw Dulat, now sitting erect in his chair, menacing the dance-hall proprietor with a heavy revolver. It was apparent that Baldwin had drawn his own gun with the purpose of shooting Pendleton, for the weapon was pointed directly at the latter. He had been surprised by Dulat, and he now stood, gray and trembling, waiting.

"Give me dat gun, Mistaire Baldwin!" ordered Dulat. "You t'ink Dulat sleeps while his frien' git himself killed by two crook—eh? Wal, you got nother t'ink comin'. Yo han' dat gun over mighty quick or I shoot dat fat belly off!"

He got up and took the gun that Baldwin held out to him. He sat down again, motioning Baldwin to another chair, in a corner.

"Dat's better," he said. "Now you set there an'

watch your frien' Silverthorn collect what he got comin'."

Silverthorn's brain was clearing. Pendleton had not struck again. He was obviously waiting until Silverthorn recovered. And about the time Dulat ceased talking to Baldwin, Silverthorn's senses returned, and he began to move toward his enemy.

Silverthorn's lips moved, but no sound came from them. He was still dizzy, but the lust to fight was still strong in him, and he lunged forward, striking savagely.

A few of his blows landed, but many more missed or were blocked or evaded. If Silverthorn had entertained the illusion that Pendleton lacked science in this primitive art he must now have realized his mistake. Silverthorn's superior weight was valueless to him, because he could not use it. Pendleton would not clinch. He moved sideways when his enemy rushed, avoiding the other's wildly swinging arms, planting his own blows accurately and with force.

Silverthorn's face was showing marks of the punishment he was receiving. His lips were smashed and puffed; his right eye was closed and the cheek below it was horribly swollen. Blood from a gash over the right eye was trickling down his face, and he was breathing with short, heavy gasps. For not all of Pendleton's blows had landed upon Silverthorn's face and head; a great many of them had thudded into his stomach and ribs. They had hurt him, too, for as he moved around the room he groaned in agony.

Still, the fierce hatred that gripped him drove him on. There was in his mind a hope that he would eventually

land one of the heavy blows he was launching; and if that time came he would be merciless.

He had heard Dulat's voice, and he had comprehended the significance of the words. He knew that there would be no interference, that he must rely upon himself. He was aware of nothing else but the form of his enemy, moving before him, dancing in and out, his fists flashing, cutting, burning. He was not aware that the front of the room was now filled with men, and that other men were trying to crowd into the room through the front doorway, and that there were dozens of white faces pressed against the glass of the front windows. He did not know that while he was fighting there were men trying to burst down the two rear doors. He did not know that outside in the street men were yelling and running; that the doors of all the buildings were vomiting their occupants, and that news of the fight had somehow got to the foreign quarter and that the foreigners themselves were pushing and jostling outside in their attempts to get a better view of what was going on inside the gambling rooms.

Silverthorn did not hear anything except his own laboured breathing; he was not concerned with anything except the man in front of him. He had lost all sense of sound and locality; he was a primitive man fighting to satisfy his hatred. He had become an insensate human organism filled with an overpowering instinct to rend and destroy.

Nor was Pendleton aware of the crowd of men that now filled the front of the room. He too had become a fighting automaton. He was intent upon the problem of beating Silverthorn, and his thoughts were concen-

trated upon that problem with terrible definiteness. The room, Paro City, all else save Silverthorn, had been obliterated from his vision. He did not hear the yells, the blows upon the rear doors; did not see the faces at the windows.

He did not feel any pain when in dodging one of Silverthorn's blows he brought up against the table holding the roulette wheel and sent it crashing to the floor behind him. He felt no pain when he caught his feet in the débris and crashed to the floor after the table and the wheel. He was concerned only with the thought that Silverthorn might catch him while he was down; and he dragged himself out of the wreck with the fury of desperation just in time to escape Silverthorn's rush. He jeered his adversary when, emerging from the débris he caught Silverthorn off balance and sent a heavy blow thudding against the latter's macerated face.

Both men were now fighting more slowly. Their muscles, while not yet tired, were lagging in their work, were meeting the demands of their minds less quickly than in the beginning of the fight. Silverthorn had grown heavy-footed and sodden; he now shuffled about the room, where before he had rested his weight upon his toes. He was still strong, though, and eager; and he followed Pendleton closely, still sullenly hopeful that he might at last land a blow that would insure him the victory.

They circled the room once more, with Silverthorn striking, missing, striking again; with Pendleton coolly measuring his man and sending home short, jolting punches. They were circling the room again. Pendleton

was passing Baldwin. He had his back to the dance hall man, and was in the act of dodging one of Silverthorn's blows when Baldwin stuck a foot out and tripped him. He slipped, wavered. Instantly Silverthorn's right arm flashed out. His fist struck Pendleton fairly upon the side of the jaw, and Pendleton went down flat upon his back, his head hitting the floor sharply and his arms falling inert beside him.

Silverthorn's blow had not more than landed when Dulat's heavy revolver, held by the muzzle, smashed Baldwin's face. Baldwin fell out of his chair, a gory, blinded, helpless mass as Dulat leaped forward and thrust the muzzle of his gun against Silverthorn's stomach.

Silverthorn paused. He had drawn his right foot back intending to kick his unconscious enemy.

"You do dat, Mistaire Silverthorn, an' dis gun she go off six tam so damn fast you t'ink she blow up!"

Silverthorn's senses were dulled by his constant and sullen lust to kill, but through the mist of his rage he saw Dulat's eyes gleaming with a light that he could not mistake. He drew back, grinning.

"That settles it," he said. "I got him; damn him, I got him!"

"You t'ink so, heh?" said Dulat. "Huh. You stan' right there. You give him chance to git up. Mebbe you don' know dat Pendleton!"

But it seemed that Pendleton would not get up. The crowd at the door pressed forward, their eyes eagerly searching his face; their cries of encouragement failing to convey any significance to his unheeding ears. A dozen of the men at the front of the room started to

come forward, thinking that the fight was over and that they would help to restore Pendleton to consciousness. These were driven back by Dulat, who deliberately turned the muzzle of his gun on them.

"Dat's far enough, gentilmen!" he declared. "Dis is Pendleton's fight, an' he goin' to fight heem. W'en he stan' on his feet an' say he got 'nough, den she's 'nough. Not before! You stan' back dere an' wait, an' don' interfere!"

The crowd from the rear rooms had finally got the rear doors open. They, too, would have swarmed into the front room, but were held back by Dulat's gun.

Meanwhile Pendleton, not badly hurt by Silverthorn's blow and the fall which followed it, was slowly raising himself to a sitting posture. He was dazed and weak, and for a time he sat there, swaying slightly from side to side, blinking at the lights and the faces, endeavouring to steady his brain and his vision. All watched him intently, seeking a sign from his manner which would tell them what his intentions would be when he finally began to realize what had happened to him. Would he acknowledge defeat, or would he continue the fight?

Nearly all of them wanted him to fight. He had few enemies among the men that crowded the room. Nearly all were his friends, and these, tense, grim of eye, impatient, were hoping he would not quit.

Pendleton smiled faintly. He remembered; his brain was clear again. He gazed around the room and saw Dulat standing near him with the drawn revolver; he saw the faces in the crowd; he looked at Baldwin, who was still lying on the floor, his smashed face bleeding

fearfully. His gaze at last went to Silverthorn, and he laughed mirthlessly.

"You landed one, eh?" he said. "Looks like you were thinkin' of usin' your feet, too. Well, come on!"

He got to his feet, swaying a little. The smile left his lips as Silverthorn rushed at him and struck viciously in an effort to take advantage of his weakness. Pendleton rolled his head sideways and the blow missed, though the impetus of Silverthorn's rush brought the bodies of both men together with a thud that seemed to jar the building. There followed a flurry of blows, straining of muscles. Then came the peculiar, sodden thudding of hard knuckles striking flesh.

Silverthorn reeled backward, Pendleton following. Heavy, deadening blows were landing upon Silverthorn's jaws and cheeks and head. He swung his arms wildly in an effort to fend them off, but Pendleton was striking so fast that Silverthorn could not see his arms move. His head was jolted back; he rocked on his heels, he swayed and reeled about the room, his arms flailing in desperation but meeting nothing, his eyes glazed, his legs bending at the knees. Half a dozen times he threw himself blindly forward, swinging at the elusive target in front of him, only to miss and be staggered again by blows that brought him to a sudden shuddering halt.

Presently, seeming to confess weakness, he dropped his hands to his sides and stood, staring at the floor. Apparently he was acknowledging defeat, and a dozen voices yelled at Pendleton, telling him not to strike again.

"Hell!" shouted one voice; "he's dead on his feet!"

Pendleton had no intention of striking his now help-

less enemy. He moved forward to speak. Yet a gleam in Silverthorn's eyes warned him, and he leaped sideways just in time to evade Silverthorn's heavy lightning kick, aimed at his stomach.

And now came gasps and a chorus from the crowd, whose pity had changed to resentment by the big man's foul tactics.

"Kill him!" screeched a man. "Damn him, bust his jaw!" yelled another.

Silverthorn was rushing again. He wanted to clinch with his antagonist, and he crowded Pendleton into a corner, with the onlookers now yelling excitedly. When it appeared that Silverthorn must finally succeed in clinching there came another succession of thudding blows and Silverthorn pitched out of the corner and fell to his hands and knees near the centre of the room.

He got to his feet and stood, as before, with his hands hanging loosely at his sides. This time Pendleton approached him cautiously. When within striking distance, Pendleton's right fist swished out. The blow landed on Silverthorn's jaw and he pitched forward, face down, to the floor.

The crowd surged forward, but Dulat stood in front of them, his gun menacing them.

"Wait!" he ordered. "Mebbe he not licked yet. Nobody goin' interfere!"

But Silverthorn was "licked." For a time he was motionless. Then he stirred and squirmed and twisted until he was sitting on the floor, swaying dizzily. He sat there, seemingly unheeding the cries and jeers of the men watching him. He did not move when Dulat approached him, stood over him.

"You want fight some more?" asked Dulat.

Silverthorn did not look up, but his heavy head moved slowly from side to side.

"You got 'nough, eh?" insisted the Canadian.

Silverthorn's head dipped affirmatively.

"Well, den, I expect she's over," smiled Dulat.

Pendleton looked at the crowd.

"Where's Jerry Calder?" he asked.

There was a scurrying of feet, an interval of silence, and then Jerry Calder came into the room escorted by Nado and O'Hara. They shoved the boy forward to the edge of the crowd, where he confronted Pendleton, and where he could see Silverthorn, sitting on the floor.

Jerry was pale. He had been lashed to the hitching rack outside, closely guarded by his captors, and he had heard the sounds of the conflict. By this time his senses had been assailed with the conviction that he had been wrong in attacking Pendleton, and he was subdued and abashed with Pendleton's gaze upon him.

Pendleton released the youth. Then he seized one of his arms and drew him over near Silverthorn. He lifted the big man to his feet and turned him so that he faced Jerry. Dulat, from behind, steadied Silverthorn.

"Silverthorn," said Pendleton, "tell Jerry Calder that you are a liar!"

Silverthorn raised his head and looked at Pendleton and Jerry.

"What I said wasn't true," he mumbled through his macerated lips.

Pendleton's right hand gripped Jerry's collar. At this instant Pendleton seemed at least ten years older than Jerry.

"You come with me, young man!" he said.

He led Jerry outside, forced him to mount his horse, sprang into his own saddle. The two rode down the street, then veered northward, toward the Calder home. Jerry was still pale and subdued.

When they reached the Calder house a figure in white was standing at one of the slender columns of the porch. The figure left the porch and ran forward when Jerry and Pendleton came close.

"Pendleton! Jerry!" came in Mary's voice—a voice in which there was a suggestion of tears.

"It's all right, ma'am," answered Pendleton grimly. "Jerry's found out his mistake, an' has come home to tell you what a fool he's been. Tell your sister you've been takin' things too much for granted, Jerry!" Pendleton's voice was low, but there was a cold quality in it that made Jerry gasp.

"I—I have, Mary!" he said.

Pendleton left them standing at the edge of the porch. Mary's arms were around Jerry.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THERE were some bruises on Pendleton's face, and a slight abrasion where Silverthorn's fist had struck him a glancing blow. There were strange pains in various muscles of his body. Yet the visible evidence of the conflict was so slight that early the next morning when he called for his horse the keeper of the livery stable, who had heard of the fight, looked keenly at him and said:

"From what I hear you was raisin' hell with that guy Silverthorn last night. But there don't seem to be much the matter with you. You must have beat him up some. He's a heavier man than you, too. I reckon you must be pretty active on your feet." He seemed to be appraising Pendleton. "You don't look much like a scrapper." He grinned widely. "I reckon that's where Silverthorn made *his* mistake, eh? Well, you never can tell."

Pendleton rode westward, into the foothills. He meant this morning to have a look at the objects which he and Mary Calder had observed Silverthorn and Blackburn examining.

He was in no hurry though, and he rode slowly, thinking of Mary and Jerry. He had given the boy one lesson, and he had satisfied a primitive lust that had gripped him with his first sight of Silverthorn. On that first day he had yearned to punish Silverthorn for his actions in

Ligget's Valley, and he had fought the man, with a grim pleasure in the task.

He rode up a slope to a bench of the mountain upon which he and Mary Calder had sat the day before when they had watched Silverthorn and Blackburn. He was in no particular hurry to do his investigating, and when after a while he reached the rock ledge where he had sat beside the girl, his thoughts were entirely of her.

He remembered the expression of her face when she had been confessing the sins of the members of her family. The grayness of her lips had told him of her emotion, and had also told him other things. First, that she liked him. She liked him or she would not have spoken. She had been frank with him when she expected that her frankness would send him from her.

He was delighted that what she had told him had not lessened his regard for her. Rather, he thought better of her than before. In fact, he was thrilled this morning as he had never been thrilled before. He knew there were people whose enthusiasm for a girl would have cooled after hearing such a confession; a narrow morality would have influenced them. They would have felt that undesirable family traits must have descended to the girl.

Pendleton knew better. Mary Calder was congenitally honest. She would stay honest. There had been bred in her a sturdy morality which would govern her actions all her days.

Yet he would love her, anyway. These thoughts of his were subconscious; he was aware of only an enchanting elation over the fact that she had thought enough of him to confide in him.

He had come to Paro with a definite purpose, having

been commissioned to attempt to find the murderer of the express messenger. He was, as Simeon Calder had already suspected, in the employ of the express company, and he had ridden the sorrel horse to the section in the hope that seeing and recognizing the animal, the murderer would betray some sign. So far he had seen no one who had exhibited more than ordinary interest in the horse.

In his rides in the vicinity of Paro he had come upon the cairn where the body of the messenger had been buried. He knew where he should find it, for an agent who had previously visited Paro had discovered it.

Pendleton had closely scanned every saddle he had seen since he had reached Paro. He had spent quite a little time slyly questioning various residents of Paro. He had questioned Mary Calder, obliquely. So far he had discovered no clue. Knowing that Simeon Calder and Daniel Blackburn were the oldest settlers in the country, and that they lived close to where the murder had been committed, he meant some day to question them. There was no hurry about that, however. He had been given plenty of time, and told that time was not as important as the ultimate bringing of the murderer to justice.

Jim Temple was aware of his object in coming to Paro, and the arrangement with Temple under which Pendleton was to become Paro's town marshal had been made months before Pendleton's appearance in the town.

Pendleton sat for a long time on the rock ledge. He intended, before the day was over, to ride to the Calder ranch-house to invite Mary to go riding with him, keeping the promise he had made her yesterday. He thought

he had made her understand that he was not interested in her family, but only in her.

"I expect she knows that, though," he told himself. "If I was looking anything like I felt there was no need of sayin' anything."

He was still sitting on the ledge an hour later, when he saw a dust cloud moving toward him from out of the dun country southward. In the dust cloud was a rider.

Lazily, screened by some brush in front of the ledge, Pendleton watched the rider. The latter was moving rapidly, straight toward him. At first Pendleton's thought was that the rider was Mary Calder, and his eyes glowed with interest. Later he observed that the rider was a man. He still watched, but with lessened interest, as the rider continued to approach.

Later he recognized the rider as Blackburn. He sat erect.

Blackburn was headed toward the gorge where he and Silverthorn had been examining something the day before.

"Wants another look at it," was Pendleton's thought. "Wants to look at it alone."

He followed Blackburn's movements with a new intentness. He observed that Blackburn's movements were furtive, that he glanced about him often as though fearful that someone might be watching him. He saw Blackburn ride down into the gorge a little distance and bring his horse to a halt. Blackburn sat for a time in the saddle, shading his eyes with his hands as he scanned the surrounding country. Apparently satisfied that no one was watching him, Blackburn at last dismounted, walked a few feet and vanished. He was invisible for

some time, and when he at last appeared he was dragging something. Pendleton's muscles stiffened, for he could plainly see that the object which Blackburn had dragged forth was a saddle. The pommel, the cantle and the stirrups were visible. Yesterday the saddle had been dragged along the ground, and Pendleton could not identify it, but now Blackburn was holding it up, seemingly to give it a thorough inspection.

After a while Blackburn dropped the saddle to the ground and stood, either pulling at his hat brim or scratching his head. He stood for a time, looking down at the saddle, then he seized it by the pommel and dragged it away to the place where it had been hidden.

Again Blackburn vanished. This time he stayed longer, and when he reappeared he went directly to his horse, mounted and rode rapidly away, over the dun-coloured land over which he had come.

Twice before he vanished beyond the skyline Blackburn gazed back toward the gorge where the saddle was hidden. He still appeared to be fearful that he was watched.

Not until half an hour after Blackburn's final disappearance did Pendleton move. Then he sought his horse, which had been grazing in a gully behind him. He mounted, rode rapidly down the bench and reached the lower country. Finally getting out of the foothills he rode across a level and at last mounted an upland which took him to the head of the gorge near where he had seen Blackburn.

He had no difficulty in finding the place where Silverthorn and Blackburn had halted their horses. He dis-

mounted there and followed the marks of the dragged saddle to its place of concealment.

All around the hiding places were prints of the boots of the two men who had visited the spot, and presently Pendleton was standing behind the shoulder of rock, gazing down at the saddle, which had been thrown into the farthest end of the recess.

He nodded his head as he looked down at the saddle. He had no difficulty in recognizing it as the one that had been used by the unfortunate messenger, for the words "Wells-Fargo," seared into the leather by a hot iron, were still visible.

Pendleton drew the saddle out of the recess. The movement disclosed a rusted Colt .45 revolver and a Winchester rifle, also rusted. Pendleton examined both weapons. Both were loaded. He dropped the weapons into the dust, searched the pockets of the saddle skirt, and found nothing. The express pouch was missing, and there was no sign in the dust of the place to show that it had ever lain there with the saddle and the firearms.

Pendleton walked out of the recess and stood beside his horse for a time, thinking.

He was aware that Silverthorn and Blackburn might accidentally have discovered the saddle, but why had Blackburn returned alone, for another view? And why had Blackburn been so obviously afraid that his second visit—if indeed that was only his second visit—might be witnessed by someone?

Pendleton mounted and rode up out of the gorge. When he reached a ridge that rose above the level country surrounding it he could see Blackburn far away, riding toward his ranch-house.

Pendleton rode down the gorge and into the valley where the messenger had been murdered. Once before he had inspected the section in the vicinity of the cairn, but he did so again, starting at the grave and circling slowly outward for several hundred feet.

Rains had obliterated any signs that might have interested him; and he found nothing which would aid him in identifying the murderer.

About noon he rode out of the valley and gained the level land above. He rode straight eastward, following a dim trail which he expected would lead him to the Blackburn ranch. Mid-afternoon had come when he rode up to the side door of the house, dismounted and strode across the narrow porch to the doorway. He had not seen Blackburn around and thought he must be inside.

Mrs. Blackburn answered his summons.

Pendleton asked if Blackburn was in the house, and introduced himself.

He was mildly astonished when he observed Mrs. Blackburn exhibit agitation. She grew rigid, her eyes widened, her lips whitened.

"Mr. Blackburn is in Paro," she informed Pendleton. "He left at noon. They are starting work on the new hotel."

"Thank you. I'll see him there," answered Pendleton. He smiled.

But Pendleton did not go immediately, for he was interested in the phenomenon of Mrs. Blackburn's agitation. Just why she should seem startled at sight of him he could not understand. He walked to the edge of the porch and sat down upon it.

"Hot," he said.

"Very," returned Mrs. Blackburn. Pendleton now turned and observed that Mrs. Blackburn's hands were clasped. The fingers were twining and untwining, and there was still a trace of grayness about her lips.

"Is—is it anything important?" she asked in a low strained voice. "Because if it is I could send somebody to bring Mr. Blackburn here."

"Nothing important, Mrs. Blackburn. I was ridin' by an' thought I'd stop. I've met Mr. Blackburn before, you know."

"He has spoken of you. You are the town marshal." She seemed to be probing his eyes for something she expected to find in them behind the pleasant gleam that was in them.

"Why," she said, "you are a very young man! Have you had experience as an officer before coming here?"

Mrs. Blackburn had made the mistake that Mary Calder had made. She had judged Pendleton's age by looking at his face in repose, and by observing first the boyish light in his eyes. And as with Mary Calder he now answered Mrs. Blackburn.

"Well, I reckon I could be older, that's a fact. But there are young men who have had experiences, Mrs. Blackburn."

She drew a deep breath. "Yes; you must have had experience or Jim Temple would not have brought you here. Paro has had a great deal of trouble with wicked men. But you have already disposed of one of those men." A shiver ran over her. She was silent.

"You were one of the first settlers in Paro Basin, I understand," said Pendleton, breaking the silence.

"The first. We came here twenty-one years ago."

"Pioneering is hard work," suggested Pendleton.

"Yes; there were difficulties."

"But now things are different. How do you adjust yourself to the thought of your husband building a modern hotel in what was once a wilderness?"

"I sometimes think we would have been happier without the prosperity that has come to us."

"Well; wealth has its drawbacks. One is that it won't buy everything. The railroad came through here after the two-year drought, I have heard."

"Yes." Mrs. Blackburn seemed to gasp the word.

"It was a terrible thing—that drought," said Pendleton. "It must have been hard for you."

"We had practically nothing when it ended."

Pendleton was silent for an instant; then he drawled:

"Things have a strange way of happenin'. I wasn't here durin' that dry spell. In fact, I knew little about it until I got here. But I come, ridin' a memento of it."

"Why!" gasped Mrs. Blackburn. "What do you mean?"

"My horse," said Pendleton. "That sorrel, Mrs. Blackburn, was the horse ridden by the express messenger when he was murdered in the valley beyond the mesa."

Mrs. Blackburn's lips had turned gray again. She closed her eyes; opened them and stared straight at Pendleton.

"I bought him from a man in Tucson, who said he'd been ridin' through the valley an' had seen him runnin' wild."

"How do you know it is the same horse?"

"That blaze face. The streak of white runnin' under the forelock, between the ears, clear to the poll. Straight down the forehead in a perfect square, to the eyes. Below the eyes, exactly in the centre of the face, a crescent, its horns extendin' upward into the eyebrows. No two horses are ever marked the same way, Mrs. Blackburn. Well, I had to pay for that horse twice. For after I bought him from the first man I ran into a second who said the horse belonged to the Wells-Fargo Express Company. I rode the horse in. He was identified, an' I had to buy him again. They told me about the messenger. Do you remember any of the incidents about the murder, Mrs. Blackburn?"

"Only that I heard it had happened."

"It happened just before the railroad went through?"

"Yes. The railroad went through the following fall."

"H'm. It was a bad year. Cattlemen were hard up, and I understand the messenger carried a great deal of gold coin. Did you happen to hear how much?"

"Banker Forbes has said the amount was five thousand dollars."

Mrs. Blackburn had grown paler. Her fingers were again twining together. Her eyes wore a worried expression.

"Was anyone around here suspected?"

Mrs. Blackburn drew a deep breath.

"I—I think not," she answered. "You see," she added, smiling faintly, "Simeon Calder and my husband were the only men living in this section at that time. They were not suspected."

"That was fortunate. It might have meant trouble for them. Such a thing is hard to prove, though. There

would have to be some evidence. It seems I have heard that the express pouches were never found, nor the saddle, nor the man's weapons."

Mrs. Blackburn abruptly turned her back to Pendleton. She held tightly to the door jambs for an instant and then went into the house. From inside came her voice:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pendleton. Will you excuse me. I—I am a little upset by—by something that happened this morning."

Pendleton mounted his horse and rode toward Paro. He was now convinced that Daniel Blackburn knew something about the murder of the messenger, and that to some extent Mrs. Blackburn shared that knowledge.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT WAS Napoleon Dulat who communicated to Pendleton the disastrous result of the blow he had dealt Kerry Baldwin with his Colt on the night of the fight. The conversation was held over Dulat's counter, in the latter's store.

"Mistaire Baldwin he ain' so damn pritty now," he said. "Dat gun she smash his face in. His nose she broke like de devil. De doctor try to feex him, but she go on crooked. Mistaire Baldwin look lak a bulldog. Mebbe now Mistaire Baldwin is not so popular with de ladies, eh?" Dulat gestured with his hands. "I hear Mistaire Baldwin sayin' 'round dat he's goin' shoot me w'en he get time. Mebbe he shoot me like Silverthorn shoot you —never!"

Pendleton had not offered to thank Dulat for what Dulat had done for him on the night of the fight. But his visits to the Dulat store had become more frequent, and there was a spirit of friendship between the two which had not been exhibited before.

Looking across the street the men could see the walls of the new hotel rising. For a month working men had teemed about the place. Masons, hod-carriers, carpenters, stone cutters and labourers were busy as bees about a hive. Men with heavy wagons and horses were unloading cars that stood on the spur of track near the station.

The hotel was being erected at a distance of several

hundred feet from the railroad tracks; and graders were shaping a number of streets around it. Other streets were being laid out by surveyors, and still other men were driving white-tipped stakes showing the location of building sites. Some of the sites had evidently been sold, for upon some of the newly made streets other buildings were being erected—dwellings and business blocks.

Already there was a decided contrast between the north and south sections of the newly built town. The north side was dirty, dingy, and squalid with its unpainted shacks, its coal and ore piles, with several small shop buildings that had recently been erected, with its refuse and rubbish. The southern side was littered with building material, with temporary tent-houses, wagons, a hoisting engine, shelters for horses and all the débris which accompanies building operations. But there hovered about the southern side an atmosphere of potential prosperity and order, of promised quality, of comparative refinement of endeavour.

Paro was betraying visible evidence of rapid growth. Every westbound train brought swarms of men who had heard the greatness of the town proclaimed. They were labourers and mechanics, merchants seeking opportunities, nomads searching for hitherto undiscovered niches in which they might bask for a time; gamblers in their never-ending hunt for victims—a heterogeneous horde of seekers after wealth gathering from all points of the compass, attracted by the stories they had heard of the "boom" which had struck the town.

Yet no one could be found who could say with definiteness what had brought the town's prosperity.

To be sure, there were the coal and iron mines lying several miles back from the railroad in their red and black hills; and of course there were the cattle, shipped by the railroad and confined—sometimes for days—in the big pens which had been built west of "town." There, also, were the grain elevator, the small shops, a virgin land, flat and vast to permit expansion, and the railroad itself, linking Paro with the outside world. These things were visible proofs of the town's basis of future greatness; but the real assurance of coming greatness was the conviction of the people and their belief in it.

A short time before, when Mary Calder had talked with Pendleton in Ligget's Valley, she had told him that the population of the town was about fourteen hundred. Now it seemed there were that many thousands.

Calder had sold his land as fast as Silverthorn could make the deeds out, at prices that amazed even Calder himself.

New frame shanties were being built by scores; more permanent buildings were rising slowly. Rows of tents stretched eastward and westward along the railroad track into the grasslands. Temporary stands were being erected by eager merchants who would not take time to build permanent structures. Several new saloons had been added to the many already established. There were many new restaurants, two small hotels, another livery stable. The bank was the busiest place in town, with hordes of depositors carefully guarding their money from thieves.

A new jail had been built, but only minor offenders occupied it. Already word had gone forth that Paro's

marshal was not to be trifled with, and those who threatened the peace of the town passed on after a quiet talk with Pendleton, or conducted themselves so circumspectly as to avoid attracting his attention.

"She's grow, eh?" remarked Dulat to Pendleton. "Some mighty toff lookin' people come in dis mornin'. By Gar! I don' wan' your job!"

"Not so tough as they look, I reckon, Dulat," answered Pendleton. "That bunch that came in this mornin' belong to the I. W. W. I've been lookin' for them, expectin' them. I heard last week they were comin'."

"I. W. W," mused Dulat. "What de I. W. W.?"

"Industrial Workers of the World," Pendleton informed him. "It's an organization whose ostensible purpose is to promote the interests of the workingman. There's more than a suspicion that they are Reds."

"Reds?"

"Anarchists. People who would overthrow the government."

"Ho, ho! Dat's fonny!" laughed Dulat. "De tam for foolishness lak dat is past. De government don' overthrow no more. European government, mebbe, but not de United States. Them guys is seeck."

"Sure. They're sick. An' they'll be sicker. But just the same they'll stir up a lot of trouble before we find the right remedy for them."

"Medicine, eh? Wal, de best medicine is to knock hell out of dem." Dulat laughed again. "Dere's too many American in dis con'try for dem feller. American lak you an' me. Don' stan' for monkey business!"

"That's right. Most of those fellows are foreigners—

real foreigners. They mean to stay foreigners. Their interest in the country is a selfish one. They're too lazy to work, and they'd like to overthrow the government in the hope that they could loaf around and get by without honest effort. In the chaos that would follow the overthrowing of the government they'd steal and rape and murder to their heart's content. What they are after is what they can take—not what they ought to earn."

"What kind of government they want?" asked Dulat.

"They've got some fool theory of direct action. That means that they would take what they want and talk afterward. The trouble with these wild-eyed idiots is that they are only half baked. They have read some things—just enough to learn that there is money in the world that they had no hand in earning. They want it. They are not normal humans. Look closely at any of them. You'll see signs of decadent morality. They're degenerates whose minds are functioning upon diseased bodies bequeathed to them by parents that should not have produced children."

"By Gar, I t'ink you are right!" declared Dulat. "People dat t'ink dem kind of thought ain't healt'y. A healt'y man don' have time to t'ink crazy t'ing. He's got 'nough to do to raise hell w'en he young, find a nice girl an' marry her, git a good job or business an' begin to raise family. He got no time for monkey business like I. W. W. Seems lak dat I. W. W. mean *'I Won't Work.'* Eh?"

"There's a bunch of those fellows in the mines," said Pendleton. "I hear they are shiftless and lazy. Spend most of their time talking. A lot of them board at

Linn's Hotel. They hold meetings in the big room next door."

Dulat's eyes lighted. "I t'ink dat Cosnoff is I. W. W. Feller with black whisker, an' scar on his neck."

"He's one of the leaders. You can pick them out, Dulat. You've got a good eye."

"Wal, by Gar! Dat feller! He overthrow government, eh? He ain't got sense 'nough to eat w'en he hongry!"

"That's him. He's stirring things up over at the new hotel. Got some of the labourers to join his gang. Some of the carpenters and masons, too. I've seen the German, Sternberg, at some of their meetings."

"Sternberg! Wal, how I know dat feller never make American? I know dat. I know it right off—first time I see him. So he's I. W. W., eh? Wal, wal!"

"Makawra is in it, too," said Pendleton.

"De Jap! Wal, what you expect? De Jap don't lak dis co'ntry."

"They've been after George Washington Logan," Pendleton informed him.

"The black man?"

"Yep. What do you think Logan told them when they asked him to join?"

Dulat shook his head with a sharp negative.

"'Look yere, white man,' George Washington Logan said, 'My initials am G. W. an' I ain't gwine change 'em to I. W. W.'"

"Dat black man got sense!"

"Those fellows that came in this mornin' look like jaycats to me," said Pendleton.

"Jaycats?"

"Fellows that ride the freight trains, killing men that

look like potential farm hands. If they hang around here any length of time there will be trouble."

Pendleton left, and for a few minutes following his departure Dulat leaned on the counter thoughtfully gazing out of the front window. He was still in that position five minutes later when a short, dark-faced man entered. The man wore ill-fitting clothes, moved with quick, nervous motions, and had black, lambent eyes that glowed with a strange fire.

Dulat recognized him instantly as Cosnoff, and instantly decided upon his method of dealing with him.

Cosnoff moved to the counter and spoke in a low, confidential voice:

"You got any good guns here?"

"Rifle, revolver, shotgun. Plenty."

"Let's have a look at a revolver—a .38."

Dulat showed his flashing white teeth in a huge laugh.

"Wal, by golly, dat's fonny!" he said, finishing his laugh. "I have one .38 gun. But just ten minutes ago I sell him."

"There's one in the case, ain't there?"

"Sure. Dat's it. Feller buy him an' pay for him, an' tell me to keep him for couple day."

The black eyes regarded Dulat with something that closely approached suspicion.

"Sounds odd," he said. "Why didn't the man take the gun with him?"

"People got fonny notion, eh? Wal, dey plenty people got fonny notion. Fonny notion to buy gun at all, eh? What a feller want a gun for, in town?"

"You're here to sell 'em, ain't you?"

"Sure. Dat's my business."

"All right then. Lets see one of those .45 automatics."

"Queer t'ing," said Dulat, apologetically. "Mebbe I ought to tell you right away. De boss of de Regulators was in here first t'ing this mornin' an' give me order not to sell any gun."

"What?"

"Dat's a fac', mistaire. He say to me: 'Napoleon Dulat, come this mornin' a lot of stranger to town. Dey look lak I. W. W. Don' sell no more gun. You save every gun for the Regulators, in case we have to go out an' shoot hell out of dem I. W. W. feller.'"

"Rifles too, an' shotguns?"

"Evert'ing. Mistaire, dere is only one way to buy a gun here."

"How's that?"

"You know the town marshal—Neal Pendleton? Wal, you go to Pendleton, tell heem what for you want de gun. Mebbe he give you an order."

"You mean I've got to have an order to buy a gun?"

"Dat's what I tell you, mistaire."

Cosnoff glared at Dulat and went out of the store. Dulat watched him until he could no longer see him, then returned to his former position at the counter. He again gazed at the new hotel across the railroad tracks, this time ruminatively, seriously.

"Wal, Napoleon," he finally said to himself, "you make a mighty poor business man. You got gun to sell an' you don't sell him. H'm. Mighty poor business man, but mebbe good American, eh?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SILVERTHORN had kept himself invisible for several days following the fight, and when he finally appeared on the street there were few marks on his face to reveal the punishment he had taken. Kerry Baldwin had received greater punishment, for his nose had been broken and in spite of the efforts of the surgeon who had been brought from a distant town that feature of the dance-hall man's face would be permanently disfigured. After three weeks, when the cast was removed, the nose was hugely dented and slightly awry. Baldwin took one look at it in a mirror and filled his room with profanity and threats.

Perhaps Silverthorn would not have appeared in public so soon had it not been that Daniel Blackburn kept insisting upon seeing him. Blackburn's deeds and contracts required attention and Blackburn would not be denied. Also, Blackburn was worried about the tobacco pouch.

"You didn't happen to pick up anything in that recess the day we found that saddle?" he baldly asked the big man within five minutes after the beginning of his first interview, following Silverthorn's appearance at his office. "Seems to me whoever threw that saddle there might have dropped somethin'. You say you didn't pick up anything?"

Silverthorn gazed straight at Blackburn with unwavering eyes.

"Nothing," he lied.

Blackburn had hoped. If Silverthorn had found the tobacco pouch he might be able to get it from him and induce him to say nothing about finding it. But if Silverthorn had not picked it up he must conclude that another person had been in the cache and had found it.

And if another man had been in the cache long enough to find the pouch he must have seen the saddle there. Sooner or later he would talk about what he had found and Simeon Calder would be accused.

"So you didn't find anything?" insisted Blackburn.

"No," again lied Silverthorn. "What was there to find?"

"Nothin' mebbe. I was just wonderin'."

"Well, I didn't find anything there. In fact, I wasn't looking for anything. But there ought to be something more there—now that you speak of it. The express pouch, for example. It is to be presumed that the messenger carried one. We didn't see anything of it. Very likely the murderer took it away with him—with the money. Have you said anything to anybody about finding the saddle?"

"No." Blackburn looked worried. "I suppose we ought to?"

"No!" decided Silverthorn. "I wouldn't. Keep quiet about it. Why should you get mixed up in a thing like that? There would be an examination, a lot of talk. Maybe suspicion would be directed to you. As I understand it you and Calder were the only two men that

lived near here when the murder occurred. They'd take the thing to court and there would have to be explanations. You'd have to prove where you were when the murder was committed; you'd have to account for your movements over a number of days. If by any chance anyone had seen you riding in that direction about that time things might turn out pretty awkwardly for you. The best thing to do is to say nothing. If anybody has found anything more than we found, let them do the talking. The best thing to do in an affair of that kind is to mind your own business."

"I reckon you're right," agreed Blackburn. Sighing, he devoted his attention to the making out of the deeds and the contracts.

Yet not all of Blackburn's legal business was conducted in Silverthorn's office. Many times during the weeks that followed, Silverthorn found it necessary to visit the Blackburn ranch-house, and not always did he talk of legal affairs with Blackburn.

For Silverthorn had observed by certain signs the state of Jane Blackburn's feelings toward him, and very slowly and adroitly he set about to establish himself more firmly in the good graces of the girl.

Silverthorn was handsome, and could make himself attractive to women when he wished. He paid deliberate court to Jane, and within a month the girl was madly in love with him. They took long rides into the hills surrounding the basin; they spent hours together upon the veranda of the ranch-house. At the end of a month Silverthorn could have made a declaration with complete assurance of being accepted.

But Silverthorn wanted no wife. He wanted Black-

burn's land. If not all of it, as much as he could get without risking his freedom.

One thing disturbed Silverthorn. That was Mrs. Blackburn's manner of covertly watching him. Many times when Mrs. Blackburn was near him he caught her gaze upon him. It seemed to him that she was studying him, appraising him, attempting to estimate his worth. At first Silverthorn was convinced that she was doing this in an attempt to determine his probable value as a husband for her daughter, and though he was amused, knowing that he had no intention of marrying the girl, he unconsciously posed for the older woman and made himself as agreeable to her as possible. In fact, he cultivated her in his most courtly manner. He sometimes gave her as much attention as he bestowed upon Jane. As a result Mrs. Blackburn's admiration of him became ardent.

Yet it became plain to him that Mrs. Blackburn's attitude was significant of something more than mere admiration. He observed that at times when she looked at him she did so with a light in her eyes which was almost articulate with a desire to become confidential. There were times when her glances at him were wistful. Often she seemed worried. A dozen times he had observed her biting her lips as though in an effort to repress something she yearned to say to him.

Silverthorn became interested. If she had something she contemplated telling him he would make the task easy for her. He began playfully to pay her little attentions such as a prospective son-in-law is expected to pay to the mother of the girl he is to marry. He became gently considerate. At times when Jane did not happen

to be near he would take Mrs. Blackburn's arm and walk with her about the yard of the ranch-house, pretending to be interested in various things. This was to give her an opportunity to begin her confidences.

Mrs. Blackburn did not speak, however, until one day when Silverthorn, having been with Blackburn on a ride to the southern limits of the land, returned to the house to find that Jane had ridden to Paro. Blackburn had also ridden into town, and Silverthorn found himself standing at the edge of the veranda, alone with Mrs. Blackburn.

The lady walked to the column nearest Silverthorn, leaned against it and looked straight at her guest. Her face was flushed and she was trembling, but in her manner was determination.

"Mr. Silverthorn," she said, "you are a friend. You like my husband and you like my daughter."

"Don't forget Mrs. Blackburn," smiled Silverthorn.

"That makes it easier for me," said the lady. "You see, the matter I want to talk to you about couldn't be mentioned to—to anyone except one I feel I could depend upon. I—I don't even know if I am doing right in speaking to you. But I feel I must tell somebody. I have been worrying about it ever since it happened, and I am going to tell you because you are a lawyer and will be able to advise me. Will you give a promise of secrecy in what I am about to tell you—no matter what it is?"

"Mrs. Blackburn, I have been a lawyer for a good many years, and I know many secrets. If you choose to tell me anything you may be assured I shall not repeat it."

"Then I have something to show you. Wait!"

Mrs. Blackburn went into the house, and when she returned after an interval she walked straight to Silverthorn and placed in his hands the missing express pouch.

Silverthorn suppressed an exclamation of amazement. He succeeded in keeping his face set in a mask of wondering interest as Mrs. Blackburn stepped back and watched him.

And then, afterward, while the woman told him how one morning more than a year before she had found the pouch where Blackburn had hidden it—she watching him—and how she had fought herself to keep silent after being informed of the killing of the messenger, Silverthorn managed to keep his face expressionless lest she cease talking.

"You see, Mr. Silverthorn," she went on, "I didn't want to know the truth. I was afraid that if I mentioned finding the pouch Dan would confess that he did the murder. I have kept putting it off, hoping that the murderer would be found and that it wouldn't be Dan. But now I know something is going to happen. I can feel it! That man Pendleton stopped here one day about the time you had the fight with him. He sat there on the edge of the side porch and asked questions. He asked about the murder. He wanted to know how we had managed to survive the dry spell. He wanted to know how much money the messenger had carried. His questions all seemed to point to Dan. I'm sure he has been sent here by the express company to find who killed the messenger, and I am satisfied that he thinks Dan did it! Oh, if Dan would only say something about it! If he

would only say he is innocent! But he doesn't mention it."

Silverthorn's thoughts went to the initialled tobacco pouch which was at that minute in his pocket. A word from him would have assured Mrs. Blackburn of the innocence of her husband. But Silverthorn did not speak that word. He was silent, attentive. He wanted Mrs. Blackburn to say more.

"I have been watching you, Mr. Silverthorn," she went on. "You are a good friend, you are honest and you are a lawyer. You will know how to help me—to help Dan. Tell me what to do?" cried the harassed woman.

"There, there, Mrs. Blackburn; I wouldn't worry." Silverthorn's arm was on the woman's shoulders; he patted her gently, consolingly. "The thing to do is to do nothing for the present. Do not say anything, even to your husband. Leave this thing to me. Perhaps Pendleton isn't here in the interests of the express company after all. Pendleton is meddlesome. That is all, I think."

He walked about the yard with Mrs. Blackburn, further consoling her, reassuring her. He still held the express pouch. And after a while, when Mrs. Blackburn began to cry, he led her into the house, dropping the express pouch at the edge of the side porch as he went toward the kitchen door. He escorted Mrs. Blackburn inside, soothing her, and presently told her that he must go back to Paro, and that meanwhile she should not worry. Everything could safely be left to him.

Emerging from the side door Silverthorn picked up the express pouch, carried it to the front veranda and

placed it under the floor, back of a big rock that supported the southwestern column. Walking rapidly he went to his horse, mounted and rode toward Paro.

In a shack near the new hotel Silverthorn found Blackburn looking over some drawings with one of the workmen. He stood outside the door, smiling, until Blackburn finished with the plans, then he asked the other man to step over to his office for a few minutes. Later, when Blackburn was sitting at a table opposite him, he said:

"Blackburn, the legal aspect of a thing always interests me. Now look here. I've been thinking of that saddle we found in that rock recess. There was a rifle there, and a revolver. It looks like they belonged to that murdered express messenger. They are on your land." He paused.

"Well?" said Blackburn. He flushed darkly.

"Well," said Silverthorn gravely. "That's the situation. "I understand that at the time the murder was committed you and Simeon Calder were about the only ranchers living in the vicinity. Now if the law discovers the saddle the first thing it will want to know is who committed that murder—you or Calder. Can you prove your innocence?"

"I can't prove anything about it!" Blackburn declared. "I don't know anything about it!"

"Can you prove you were not in the valley when the murder was committed?"

"I reckon not. I've been used to rovin' around when I wanted to. I may have been in that valley on the day the messenger was killed. I don't know." Blackburn felt that he now could not tell what he had seen that

day. He had kept silent too long. He would be accused of complicity. He decided that it would be best for him to pretend to know nothing about the crime.

"Blackburn, it looks bad for you. Almost anything may turn up. Have you ever thought of that? Have you ever thought of what might happen if you were charged with murder while all this work is going on? You wouldn't be here to direct things. Your wife and daughter would be helpless. Those things must be considered."

"I've been thinkin' of that," said Blackburn, "since we found that saddle. They might say I did it. But I ain't worryin' none about the work." He smiled wanly. "You're a pretty good friend of Jane's. You could take care of it."

Silverthorn looked at Blackburn through a short silence.

"Yes; I might," he said finally. "But I'd have to have a power of attorney."

"All right. Make it out an' I'll sign it. I've been feelin' right along that somethin' was goin' to happen!"

Blackburn got up and began to pace the floor. Silverthorn searched in his desk for a legal blank and began to write. Blackburn continued to walk back and forth. He halted for a moment at one of the front windows and gazed down into the street. He was moving away again when he started, stared intently, took out a handkerchief and began to wipe a sudden perspiration from his forehead.

He walked away from the window rubbing his eyes. He went back again and stood there, rigid. His heavy breathing was audible to Silverthorn.

Silverthorn stopped writing and looked at Blackburn.

Blackburn had turned and was now facing the lawyer. Blackburn's face was now pale and his eyes were burning with a strange light.

"What's up, man?" asked Silverthorn. He was half out of his chair; he leaned on the desk top and stared at Blackburn.

"I've been feelin' right along that somethin' would happen!" said Blackburn shakily. "It's happened!"

He was trembling with excitement; his gaze was wild. He strode to Silverthorn, seized him by an arm and dragged him to the window.

"See that horse down there!" he said. "That sorrel with the blaze face! That's the horse that messenger rode! I'd know him among a million! Who owns him?"

Silverthorn's eyes glinted, but his voice was casual.

"That horse belongs to Pendleton," he said. "Do you mean to say this is the first time you have noticed him?"

"This is the first time." Blackburn strode from the window and dropped heavily into the chair he had previously occupied. He leaned his arms on the table top and sat there for a time, silent, breathing fast.

"Pendleton's horse," he finally said. "Well; I've been expectin' it. I reckon the time has come for me to tell what I know about that killin'." He mopped his forehead again.

"I ain't tellin' everybody," he added. "Just you. If anything turns up I want you to take my end of it in court. Seems as if I ought to have told about it long ago. But I didn't want to get anybody in trouble."

He then related what he knew about the killing of the messenger. When he concluded he added:

"That was why I asked you if you'd found anything

there in that rock recess. I throwed Calder's tobacco pouch there. If we had that we could put the guilt where it belongs—on Simeon Calder. But if we can't find that pouch I reckon Calder's word will be as good as mine."

"That's unfortunate." Silverthorn's voice was mild. "It is not likely that anything will develop from the finding of that saddle. They can't prove anything. But what has occurred merely vindicates what I said previously about being prepared."

He turned again to his desk and filled out the paper. When he had completed it he offered it to Blackburn to sign; then went to a door that led to another room and called in a disreputable-looking young man to witness Blackburn's signature and to affix the notarial seal.

The man was a clerk. Blackburn had met him before. Another man was called from somewhere, and the power of attorney was legally given. Silverthorn stuck the paper in a pigeon hole of his desk and smiled blandly at Blackburn.

"That's settled," he said. He got up, patted Blackburn on the back and gently led him to the door, down the steps and into the street.

"You go right back to work, just as though nothing had happened," he told Blackburn. "If anything turns up from that saddle incident, you may rely on me to straighten it out for you. The messenger was only an Indian, anyway, and they used to shoot them out here for the fun of it. Don't let it worry you, Blackburn. Don't even think of it!"

He saw Blackburn start across the railroad tracks to

go back to the hotel. For a time he stood on the sidewalk in front of the building containing his office, smiling. When he observed that Blackburn had reached the new hotel building and was talking with some men, he walked slowly down the street, peering into the windows of the stores he passed. He saw Pendleton in Dulat's place, apparently deeply interested in a conversation with his friend. But Silverthorn had no intention of seeking out Pendleton personally. He went on down the street until he reached the Palace Dance Hall. He went around to the back, to Baldwin's office. Inside, talking with Baldwin, he found a gambler named Kelcy. Kelcy was a quiet-voiced, mannerly fellow, suave and gentlemanly, who had been upon intimate terms with Silverthorn in other ventures in various parts of the country.

Silverthorn drew Kelcy aside and talked long and earnestly with him. Several times Kelcy nodded his head.

After a time Kelcy left the Palace. He walked down the street, reached Dulat's store, peered into the window, observed Pendleton inside, and entered. He stood for a short space near the front door with an appearance of polite absence of interest in the conversation between Dulat and Pendleton, who was still there. And then, when Dulat came toward him, he smiled and nodded toward Pendleton.

"I'd like to speak to you privately, Mr. Marshal," he said.

Pendleton followed him into the street. Kelcy faced Pendleton.

"Mr. Marshal," he said, "a rumour has reached me that in addition to being marshal of this town you are a

detective employed by the Wells-Fargo Express Company to find the man who murdered a company messenget about a year and a half ago."

"I haven't said anything about it, Kelcy," answered Pendleton.

"Well, I'm not saying that you are a detective. However, I know for certain that you are town marshal here, and I am going to give you a chance to grab the man who murdered the messenger."

"Well?"

"I'm pretty positive he is Dan Blackburn."

"How do you know?"

"Well, the other day I was riding down a gorge into a valley straight west from here. I can take you there any time. In a sort of a cave behind a rock ledge I found a saddle with 'Wells-Fargo' stamped on it. Also a rifle and a revolver."

Kelcy paused.

"Well?"

"The cave is on Blackburn's land. Well, having heard about the messenger, I was curious. I rode over to Blackburn's place this morning. I was nosing around in some timber near the house when I saw Mrs. Blackburn come out of the house carrying a leather pouch. She threw the pouch under the veranda. If I am not mistaken she hid it back of a rock at the southwest corner. I didn't go over to see. I am convinced that she didn't see me and that the pouch is still there. To be sure, I don't know whether the pouch belonged to the messenger or not, but while I was riding away I was putting two and two together, and it struck me that it was mighty strange that the saddle should be on Blackburn's land

and the pouch under his porch. Anyway, it isn't my affair. You're the marshal here."

Pendleton thanked Kelcy and watched the man walk away. Presently he went to the hitching rack where his horse was tied, swung into the saddle and rode straight to the Blackburn ranch-house.

There was no one about and Pendleton dismounted at the southwestern corner of the veranda, dropped to his knees and peered under. He drew out the express pouch, leaped into the saddle again and rode back to Paro. He sought out Judge Noble, and for more than an hour he talked with the judge and several of Jim Temple's Regulators who constituted the county's Grand Jury. Shortly before dusk Pendleton went to the new hotel building and arrested Blackburn.

When Blackburn heard the charge his face whitened, his hands dropped to his sides and his shoulders slumped forward.

"Well," he said, "I've been expectin' it."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

BLACKBURN was held in jail that night. The news of his arrest brought both Jane and Mrs. Blackburn to the jail, where the wife tearfully begged her husband to tell her he was innocent.

"Sure, I'm innocent!" Blackburn declared. "The packin' ain't all out of this case, an' when the trial comes off I'm goin' to tell everything I know about it. You just quit your worryin'."

Pendleton rode out to the rock cache the following morning and brought in the saddle, rifle and revolver. These were locked in Judge Noble's room.

Paro's population had grown so large that few of the residents had any knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the murder, but the older residents who knew Blackburn were certain, despite the evidence, that Blackburn was innocent.

"Dan ain't that kind of a man!" they declared.

The new residents were only casually interested. When the following day Blackburn was released upon his own bond and the date of his trial fixed for the autumn term of court, the incident was promptly forgotten by those residents who were eagerly pursuing their own interests.

Paro's growth was so rapid that the need for a permanent government was imperative. Late in the summer a special election was held, at which Jim Temple

was chosen Mayor. Previously the town had been granted a charter.

Jim Temple's first act was to reappoint Pendleton, giving him power to select several assistants. The cattle industry in the basin could not thrive with the grassland becoming dotted with shacks and tent-houses and railroad spurs. Land was bringing fabulous prices and the ranchers were gradually selling their holdings and retreating westward, beyond the hills. Half a dozen of the cowhands who bore the picturesque names of "Cheyenne" and "Jeff" and "Montana" and "Bill" and "Ed" and "Larry," were induced by Pendleton to forsake their old trade and join him in the task of keeping order in Paro.

These men were by no means reluctant. The cattle business was going. Towns like Paro, which were springing up all over the land, presaged the beginning of the end of the old life. The long trails were broken. Dodge, Abilene and other towns in cattleland were civilized. The slow, steady march of progress had crushed out the romance in them, just as it had crushed out the romance of the crude settlements in the East. The frontier settler could care for himself, could depend upon his own resources, but the swarms of people who came later demanded protection.

Paro would be protected. There was little doubt of that. Cheyenne and Jeff and Montana and Bill and Ed and Larry were of the type that in that day governed towns that were scattered all over the face of the land, from the Canadian border to Mexico and from the Mississippi to the Golden Gate. They were keenly conscious of the risks they ran. They might regret the pass-

ing of the old régime, but they were loyal to the new and to the Land which had nurtured them. They were Americans, although perhaps they never gave a thought to the accident of birth which made them what they were. Some of them had been born in America, although only one generation removed from the native land of their ancestors.

The jail had been again enlarged, and the former cowpunchers kept it well filled. The town teamed with adventurers, gamblers, sleight-of-hand men, pick-pockets, bad men attracted by the prospect of work peculiar to their kind. The I. W. W. members were numerous, and were beginning to make their presence felt.

The former cowboys could deal with a certain degree of tolerance with the gamblers, the thieves, the bad men and others of their ilk, because they understood them. But the I. W. W. members they regarded with contempt and watched with argus-eyed vigilance because they felt the I. W. W. principles were un-American.

Pendleton, particularly, watched Cosnoff. He had been told by Dulat of the attempt by Cosnoff to purchase firearms, and to him the attempt meant the imminence of trouble.

One night toward the close of summer Pendleton stood in the doorway of Nick Nado's place watching the crowds that filled the street. There were now several dwellings and business blocks on the southern side of the railroad tracks. Lights from their windows stabbed the heavy darkness of the night. The station agent was bending over his desk making out his reports. Hundreds of horses were tethered at the various hitching rails.

From some of the saloons issued discordant voices, indicating that a fight was in prospect. From the Palace Dance Hall came strains of music. Groups of men were gathered at various places on the sidewalks in front of the stores and saloons. There were no lights on the street, and the pale glare of kerosene lamps in the buildings could not penetrate the heavy blackness outside. The citizen who crossed the street could not be seen from the sidewalk, because the surrounding darkness pressed in and enveloped him. But the dust from his passing floated lightly upward, swirled lazily toward the buildings, and swam over the sidewalk like a yellow haze. When a rider went down the street with saddle leather creaking, the windows of dust erupted in volcanoes.

Paro was "booming." There was a strange humming in the darkness, caused by the mingling of many voices and the discord of various amusement devices. A barker called attention to his wares, exhibited inside. The bell-like ring of a target in a shooting-gallery rose above the patter of bullets. The voice of a three-card monte man was ingratiating and tantalizing. Crowds of men in shirt sleeves thronged the saloons or stood in front of them. Down in the foreign quarter there were music and singing. Around a watering trough in front of Linn's Hotel were grouped a number of members of the I. W. W., with Cosnoff among them.

Pendleton saw his deputies moving here and there in the crowds. It was not yet time for trouble, if trouble was to come, for it was early in the evening.

Pendleton had not seen Mary Calder that day, although he had spent the previous day with her, riding.

He walked down the street, past the foreigners in front of the shacks, and out into the cool darkness of the grassland. It was not so dark here, for myriad stars diffused a dim light, disclosing the distant rimming peaks of mountains. A slight breeze moved eastward; the air was keen, and laden with the faint odour of sage.

Gazing northward, Pendleton observed that only one room of the Calder ranch-house was illuminated. As usual, Mary would be alone. Her father would be busy in his saloon, her mother would probably be at the dance hall, while Jerry would be amusing himself wherever his whims took him.

Obeying a sudden impulse, Pendleton turned toward the ranch-house. He had to cross a wide stretch of level grassland, where there were none of the shacks and tent-houses that of late had magically appeared; and the grass, drying in the hot winds of late summer, rustled as he strode through it.

When he reached the edge of the veranda Mary's voice greeted him. She was sitting in a chair placed in the shadows.

"It is Mr. Pendleton, isn't it?" she said.

Pendleton stepped upon the veranda, into the beam of light that came out of the front door.

"It's me, Mary."

"I saw you coming," she declared. "I was watching Paro, and I saw you passing a gasoline torch in front of a tent-house."

"You're alone again," he said.

"Yes."

Pendleton crossed the porch, groped in the darkness for a chair, pulled it close to her and sat down.

"I was watching Paro," she said again. "I used to sit here before Paro came. It was different. It was clean. Now it seems there is a blot on the face of the land—like ink on white paper. Are all towns and cities like that?"

"Well; I hadn't thought of them that way. But I reckon they are. Anyway, they're like that before they shape up. You see, there's no orderly way of doin' things; there's more or less confusion, an' a heap of rubbish. A new town startin' out is cheap. Especially a boom town. Everybody's in a hurry to get established, to make money. They build shacks. Later, when they find time to slow up a little, they begin to build better, to make things more permanent. Right now there's talk of buildin' a water works in Paro. Some are talkin' of telephones and electric lights, sewers and paved streets and better sidewalks. Those things will come. There'll be order an' dignity. But right now there ain't much of anything that's decent."

"I'm afraid there never will be."

"You just be patient. New York wasn't always what it is to-day. Nor Washington, nor Boston. They had to start. Maybe they wasn't as wild as Paro. But they didn't grow as fast." He laughed lowly. "Give Paro a chance," he added.

They sat in silence for a long time, looking at the town, at the flickering lights from the windows. Then Mary spoke.

"When is Mr. Blackburn's trial to be?" she asked.

"Pretty soon now. I was talkin' to the prosecutor to-day. He said he'd likely get the judge to set it for the fifteenth. That will be two weeks."

"Mrs. Blackburn is terribly worried," said Mary.

"She admits Mr. Blackburn had the express pouch. She found it—where he had hidden it, in a feed bin in the stable. She did not say anything to her husband. She just waited and worried. Do you think Mr. Blackburn is guilty?"

"I don't know. The jury will decide. It looks bad for him."

"You must have some opinion. Tell me what it is!"

"Sometimes I think Blackburn did it. Again it seems to me that he didn't."

"What makes you think he didn't?"

"He doesn't seem to be that kind of man. He doesn't act like a murderer."

She sat silent. Suddenly she spoke, and her voice was cold and steady.

"Mr. Pendleton," she said, "do you realize what you almost said just now?"

"Maybe not."

"You almost said that you suspected my father!"

"No."

"You did! You must know that Father and Mr. Blackburn were the only men living in this vicinity when the murder was committed. And if you feel that Mr. Blackburn is innocent, you must have decided that Father is guilty."

"That's goin' a long way for a conclusion," he said, smiling at her in the darkness.

"It isn't! Thank goodness there is no evidence against Father! You would find it." She was silent again. Then she went on: "Do you know that if you had charged my father with the murder I would not have spoken to you again? I—I believe I should hate you!"

And then, as if the thought had brought another, she went on, slowly:

"I should think you would try to be something besides a detective. I should think you would be afraid of getting evidence that would convict your friends of crimes. Have you ever thought of that?"

"I wouldn't like to help convict my friends, of course. But I try to be particular in choosing my friends."

Presently Mary went into the house, and Pendleton sat, leaning a little forward in his chair, gazing at Paro and thinking of the girl's words.

He heard a sound as of a sudden gust of wind stirring the leaves of the trees near him, and he raised his head to look upward.

He stiffened in that position, for he felt something boring into the middle of his back, something that was being held there with vicious pressure.

He knew that the something was the steel ring of a revolver muzzle, for the man holding the weapon was close, so close that Pendleton could feel his breath on the back of his neck, could hear the rapid, heavy inhalations. The man holding the gun was excited. His nerves were on edge; his muscles were quivering so hard that the weapon jerked spasmodically.

Pendleton sat rigid and motionless. He knew from the way the owner of the gun trembled that his mental condition was such that at the slightest movement he would press the trigger. He felt that the man had meant to kill him, that he had come close in order to be certain he would not miss, and that now he was hesitating.

No word was spoken. Only the man's breath, coming in short, rapid blasts against Pendleton's neck and the

pressure of the revolver muzzle against his back, told Pendleton of his presence. Pendleton did not even lower his head. He still gazed upward, at the sky, expecting, anticipating the sharp, hot, deadening drive of the bullet through his flesh. The muscles of his back rippled and cringed, and a cold perspiration dripped from his forehead, ran in tiny streams down his cheeks and into his eyes.

Still the pressure of the gun muzzle dented his back, and the breath of the would-be murderer came against his neck. There were no sounds except the natural night noises of the plains and the timber near the house. Mary Calder's step did not break the silence. The man holding the weapon did not speak.

Behind Pendleton there was being fought a mighty mental battle. The owner of the gun was yearning to kill him, and had stolen upon him for that purpose. But now that he had his victim at his mercy he hesitated to pull the trigger. Half a dozen times Pendleton felt the hand become steady, as though the decision had been taken; then the hand would begin to tremble again, and Pendleton knew that indecision had attacked the man.

Pendleton did not speak. He knew that a word might startle the man into pulling the trigger, might strengthen his wavering intention to kill. And so he sat there motionless, his muscles rigid and straining, the perspiration streaming down his face, his flesh chilled and the cords of his neck swelling with alternate hope and dread.

He did not fear to die. He had faced death many times but he had faced it with the knowledge that he had an equal chance with his adversary. He had no such chance

here. A sudden movement, an attempt to draw his gun, to turn, would bring death instantly.

There was still no sound except the man's breathing and the night noises. These noises were magnified by Pendleton's senses, which were acute with an eagerness to hear sound—a sound—the sound of Mary's footsteps returning. Any sound to break the tension, to bring action.

Still the silence; still the man's breath striking the back of his neck, still the spasmodic pressure of the gun in the middle of his back.

He had ceased perspiring. He heard sound—a step inside the house. Mary's step!

Evidently the man heard it too, for the gun muzzle jerked as though to betray the man's agitation. Mary's step sounded nearer. For an instant the muzzle of the gun pressed more heavily against Pendleton's back. Then the man drew a breath and exhaled it slowly. The gun muzzle moved, the pressure against Pendleton's back relaxed. There was a soft rustle, and then silence. The man had gone.

For an instant Pendleton was in doubt as to whether the man really had gone. He still felt the pressure of the gun muzzle, where it had made an indentation in the flesh of his back, and he could not determine whether it was still there or whether his imagination was creating the illusion.

He stood erect. Nothing happened. He heard Mary coming toward him; he saw her as she stepped out of the front door to the veranda. From a distance there came to his ears the sound of a horse galloping, receding to greater distance.

Pendleton walked to the edge of the porch and stood in the darkness as Mary approached him and stood for an instant, facing him.

"Are you there?" she asked.

"I'm still here," he answered, laughing lowly.

"I didn't see you in the chair, and thought you had gone," she went on. "I thought I heard someone running and a horse galloping. But then I knew you had walked here." She paused. "Was anyone here?"

"Not to my knowledge," he lied.

"I have made some lemonade," she said. He now could distinguish a pitcher in her hands. He heard the clink of glass.

When he took leave of her about an hour later he asked her about Jerry. Did she expect Jerry home tonight?

"Jerry?" she said. "No. Jerry left this morning for Kansas City. He expects to be there for a week, at least."

The man with the gun could not have been Jerry.

"It's lonesome here for you," he said. "Doesn't your father ever spend an evening with you?"

"Father never comes home until after midnight," she answered.

It seemed that her father was innocent of the mysterious visit.

There were left Cosnoff and Silverthorn. Cosnoff might do a thing like that. But if the man with the gun had been Cosnoff there would have been no hesitation. He was certain of that.

He had other enemies he supposed, but none that he had given provocation enough to attempt to shoot him

in the back. He eliminated Silverthorn, because in his judgment Silverthorn was not a coward, and only a coward could meditate such a crime.

Yet when he reached Paro he found Cosnoff surrounded by his fellow I. W. W.'s. Inquiring of Napoleon Dulat, he learned that Cosnoff had not left his friends during the evening. Walking past Lee King's gambling rooms he observed Silverthorn sitting at a table in the front of the building, smoking and playing cards. He watched Silverthorn for a time, and was convinced that he was innocent. He discovered that Jerry Calder had left town that morning as Mary had said. Cheyenne told him he had seen Jerry board an eastbound train.

There was no other person that he might suspect, but he went to the two livery stables and inquired if any horses had been taken out or brought in that evening. Some had been brought in, but none had been taken out, he was told.

Later he entered the Gold Coin. He slipped in quietly, unobserved, and stood for a time at the cigar counter near the front, casually watching the drinkers and the players at the card tables. He was leaning on the cigar counter, his right hand hooked carelessly in his cartridge belt above the holster of his pistol, when he saw Simeon Calder coming toward him from the rear of the building.

Calder had apparently been in one of the back rooms where there were other tables with men seated about them; and Calder did not see Pendleton until, still walking toward the front, he reached the end of the bar near the cigar counter.

Pendleton was looking straight at Calder when

Calder glanced at him. Instantly Calder halted, stiffened. His colour fled, returned, suffusing his cheeks with crimson. For an instant there was a gleam of terrible fear in Calder's eyes. Then he nodded shortly to Pendleton and turned abruptly to one of the tables, where he stood for a time leaning over one of the chairs, talking to the man who occupied it.

And now Pendleton knew who had held the gun at his back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

ALTHOUGH he was convinced that it had been Simeon Calder who had stood behind him with the intention of killing him, Pendleton was not able to supply a motive for the action. Jerry might have told his father what had prompted him to attack Pendleton on the night of the fight with Silverthorn, but unless Jerry had suffered a moral relapse and had deliberately lied to Calder, the latter must know that it had been Silverthorn and not Pendleton who had attempted to stain Mary Calder's character. Pendleton was inclined to dismiss that incident as a motive.

Yet so far as he knew there could be no other motive except that perhaps Calder resented Pendleton's visits.

Pendleton was not disturbed over Calder's attitude. In fact, he was more amused than worried over the attack. For if Calder had lacked courage once he was not likely to make another attempt.

Pendleton was more interested in Blackburn's approaching trial, which had been set for the fifteenth.

Summonses for jury duty had been sent out, and the court officials were amazed to discover that the older residents of the section were reluctant to serve.

"Dan Blackburn ain't guilty of that murder!" positively declared one rancher. "An' I ain't goin' to set on no jury ag'in him!"

The prosecutor was dismayed when man after man called upon him to express a like sentiment. The prosecutor was a young man with ambition, and he desired a conviction. More residents of Paro were summoned.

On a morning a week before the day set for the trial, Pendleton was walking past Nick Nado's place when he observed the Greek standing in the doorway smiling broadly.

"I'm citizen now!" he declared. "American citizen!"

"You told me you wouldn't get your final papers for another year," Pendleton reminded him.

"Meestake," smiled Nado. "Judge Noble call me in yesterday. He say, 'Nick, you' paper ready. If you can tell me who was first president of this co'ntry I give you papers right now.'

"I tell him George Washington first president.

"He say 'correct.' 'Now Nick, who run this state?'

"I say: 'Wal, mebbe crook try to run him, but I t'ink she run by governor.'

"'Nick,' he say, 't'ink you got a brain. Now, I ask you some more question. What this country started for?'

"She start for liberty, I tell him.

"'What you mean?' he ask.

"'Wal, the people that come here first get seeck of takin' order from people who want them to do t'ing they don't want to do. Religion, eh?'

"'Nick,' he say, 'what you t'ink of religion?'

"'She's good t'ing. But a man want to choose his own. Men ain't the same. Different family. No two men look alike. Different face, different idee, different business. No like the same t'ing. Not the same politics. Not the same religion. Not eat the same t'ing.'

"'Nick,' he say, 'it's pity they ain't more citizen like you.'"

"I jump! 'I citizen now?'

"'Just as soon as I make out these papers and you take the oath of allegiance!' he say.

"So, I'm citizen. Next t'ing he say: 'Nick, you're goin' on jury—mebbe. I want to ask you some more questions. Do you know Daniel Blackburn?'

"I say yes.

"'You know he is accused of committing a crime?'

"'I know that.'

"'Do you think he is guilty?'

"'How can I tell?' I ask him.

"'You got any opinion?'

"'Sure not! How I get opinion? Mebbe he did. Mebbe he didn't. Somebody have to prove that.'

"'How?'

"'At the trial. Everybody tell the truth then.'

"He smile. 'Nick,' he say, 'you goin' to be good man on jury. Here's a summons.' So I'm goin' be on jury!"

There were several citizens of Nado's type on the jury that was finally selected. They sat in the jury box interestedly watching and listening as the tedious details of preparation were settled.

Sternberg, the German, had been rejected because his I. W. W. affiliations were known. But seated beside Nado were George Washington Logan, the negro, Joe Stoddard, an Englishman, Lane O'Hara, Norman Van Zeiut, Anatole Lamar, Boris Godonoff, Napoleon Dulat, Steve Latzo, Lopez, Comeila Naso and David Melcher, a store-keeper from Springer.

There were few people in the small, crude courtroom.

Half a dozen of the old settlers, the jury, the judge, the prosecutor, a bailiff, the sheriff of the county, Pendleton, Simeon Calder, and Silverthorn, who was to defend Blackburn. Mrs. Blackburn and her daughter and son were seated at a table with Blackburn himself. Mary Calder sat next to her father, far back in the room. Pendleton stood near the door that led to a long hallway.

Pendleton was quietly watching. When Mary had entered with her father the girl had smiled at him, but Calder had pretended not to see him. None of the Blackburns spoke to Pendleton or seemed to be aware of his existence, for they had heard that he had found the express pouch and they felt he was responsible for the accusation against the Blackburn name.

Pendleton studied Calder. He watched the latter's face when Blackburn took the stand to be examined. He saw Calder hang his head and refuse to look at the prisoner during the latter's occupancy of the witness chair.

Blackburn told a simple story. He had found the express pouch about the time the murder had been committed. He had taken it home, intending to take it later to the sheriff. Then he had forgotten about it. As he told his story he looked straight at Simeon Calder, as though expecting him to interrupt. But Calder did not lift his gaze.

When Blackburn said he had not seen the saddle until the day it had been discovered by Silverthorn and himself, Calder seemed to become agitated. He twisted in his chair and moved his feet.

When Blackburn finished, Kelcy took the chair. He related what he had told Pendleton about the express pouch. That was all he knew about the case.

Pendleton was called. The prosecutor drew from him the testimony he had to offer, which was that he had seen Silverthorn and the defendant at the cache, examining the saddle, and that upon receiving Kelcy's information he had ridden to the Blackburn ranch-house and recovered the express pouch.

Mrs. Blackburn refused to testify.

The jury listened attentively to the testimony. The members seemed impressed by the quiet dignity of the Blackburn family. Mrs. Blackburn and Jane were white of face and rigid, but they betrayed no other visible evidence of agitation. It was quite evident that they believed Blackburn innocent, and that they expected the jury to agree with them.

But Blackburn was gradually growing uneasy. He whispered to Silverthorn, who sat beside him while the prosecutor questioned the various witnesses; he shifted his feet, he turned twice and looked at Simeon Calder, who would not return his gaze.

There was a silence in the courtroom after the last witness had finished, and the prosecutor was about to address the judge, to tell him that the State rested its case, when Silverthorn got to his feet.

"Your honour," he said, "my client asks me to request you to call Simeon Calder to the stand!"

Calder was called. He moved forward to the witness stand without once glancing at Blackburn, and once in the chair he sat with bowed head staring at the floor. He took the oath, and paled at Silverthorn's first question:

"What is your name?"

"Simeon Calder."

"Do you know the defendant?"

Calder did, and said so. He had known Blackburn for more than twenty years.

"Did you ever see this saddle before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I saw it on the back of a sorrel horse about a year and a half ago."

"Did you ever see this express pouch before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I saw Dan Blackburn holdin' it."

There was a concerted gasp. A tension assailed the atmosphere of the room. The members of the jury leaned forward; the judge straightened. Blackburn was holding tightly to the edge of his chair.

Silverthorn smiled faintly. It was apparent that he had not expected the witness to answer as he had answered. It was also evident that he was aware that he had placed a weapon in the hands of the prosecutor, for he glanced at that gentleman, whose eyes were now alight with triumph.

If Silverthorn had committed a blunder in asking the witness the questions he had asked, he now seemed to attempt to conceal it, for he said shortly:

"The defence rests."

Calder began to step down, but the prosecutor's voice halted him:

"Just a moment, Mr. Calder!"

Judge Noble nodded. Calder sat down again.

"You say you saw Blackburn holding the express pouch. Where was he when you saw him holding it?"

"He was ridin' out of the gorge that leads up to the big level near High Mesa."

Blackburn was on his feet.

"Simeon Calder!" he shouted. "Simeon Calder, you are lying! Why don't you tell the truth? You killed that messenger! You coward! I've shielded you for more than two years! I saw you riding away from the gorge where the messenger was killed on the day we got the first money from the railroad company!"

The judge demanded order, and when Blackburn stood silent, passing a hand over his eyes, the judge continued:

"You have told your story of this crime. What you said on the stand disagrees with what you are saying now. Mr. Calder is not on trial."

Blackburn appeared dazed. He sat down heavily, and Judge Noble ordered the prosecutor to proceed.

"When you saw Blackburn riding out of the gorge what else, if anything, did he carry?" was the prosecutor's next question.

"That was all."

"Which way did Blackburn ride?"

"East—toward his ranch."

"Did he appear to be in a hurry?"

"He was ridin' fast."

"Seemed excited, eh?"

"Yes."

"This happened on the morning of the day you and Blackburn received money from the railroad company?"

"Yes."

"That is all," said the prosecutor. "We rest."

The judge charged the jury, telling them that Blackburn was charged with murder in the first degree, but that if they considered the evidence indicated lack of premeditation they might bring in a recommendation of mercy, or they might acquit. The case was in their hands; they had been summoned in the interests of justice, and that was all the law required or demanded.

The courtroom was cleared and the jury vanished into an adjoining room.

Calder strode from the courtroom without once glancing at Blackburn.

Toward dusk the jury reported. Pendleton was not in the courtroom, but news soon reached him that Blackburn had been found guilty of the charge with a recommendation of mercy. The verdict meant life imprisonment for Blackburn. Possibly Blackburn deserved the punishment. But there was something in the faces of Mrs. Blackburn and her daughter that brought grimness to Pendleton's lips as he watched the two women walk slowly away from the courthouse into the darkness of the night. It had seemed to Pendleton that Calder had lied or that he knew more than he had told.

Pendleton might have received illumination on that score had he overheard a conversation between Silverthorn and Calder that night in one of the rear rooms of the Gold Coin, and if he had been able to watch the faces of the two men.

They had closed the door of the rear room. Silverthorn looked at Calder and smiled.

"Well," he said, "it went over. He was eager to have you testify, but I think he expected you to say something different than what you did say."

Calder was nervous. His face was dead white.

"God!" he said. He looked at Silverthorn. "Now give me that tobacco pouch!"

Silverthorn smiled again. "Not right now, Calder," he answered. "I'm keeping it until I'm sure Blackburn's gone."

"But you told me you'd give it to me right after the trial!" declared Calder. "You give it to me right now, damn you, or I will——!"

The men were standing close together, and Calder suddenly felt a gun muzzle pressing against his stomach.

"Don't start anything with me, Calder!" said Silverthorn. "I'm running this thing. When I get ready to give you that pouch you'll get it. Not before! Understand?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

WITH Daniel Blackburn in the State Penitentiary, Pendleton's work in Paro City was finished. When he notified his company that justice had finally been secured he was ordered to return.

Regretfully he made his preparations. He liked Paro; he liked the activity of the town, and there were several people for whom he had formed an attachment. He spoke to Dulat of his preparations for departure, and Dulat looked straight at him and blinked rapidly.

"By golly, dat's too bad!" exclaimed the Canadian. "A feller jus' get to know you, an' you jump up an' say 'good-by.' Why you go 'way now? She's jus' begin to get interestin'. Them 'I Won't Work' feller she's goin' to raise hell pritty soon. W'at's goin' happen w'en you go 'way an' leave Silverthorn? Dat Jane Blackburn lak dat feller, an' he don't lak her, only for foolin' with her. W'en you gone he do as he damn please!

"Dere's nodder t'ing," smiled Dulat. "Dat Mary Calder love you. You go 'way now an' what happen? W'en you come back nodder feller got her—what?"

Pendleton's orders could not be disobeyed. Yet one evening as he stood on the veranda of the Calder ranch-house close to Mary, he spoke gravely to her.

"My work is done here," he said. "I'm called back to headquarters. There is only one thing that could hold me here." He paused, and took her hand, drawing her

closer. "I've tried to say it without talkin'. I think you know."

"Yes," she said, her voice almost a whisper.

"I love you, Mary," he said, "I have loved you from the first day."

"I know," she said, her voice catching. "I—I—think I have loved you, too. I know I love you now. But Neal, I can't marry you—now. We shall have to wait."

"Wait?" he said. "Why?"

She was gazing straight at him, her eyes clear and grave in the moonlight, but with shades of trouble in their depths.

"It's because of Father and Mother and Jerry and—and what has happened. I do not know just how to express myself, but it seems that things have not been straightened out yet. Everything has not been told—developed. I seem to feel that although there has been tragedy, there is more to come. I've been happy, but all the time I've had a presentiment that it could not last; that something of tremendous import was impending. I still have that feeling. It is with me day and night."

"Mary, if trouble comes to you I want to be standing near you," he told her.

"Yes. I know, I know. But—oh, Neal, I can't, can't!"

Pendleton drew her, unresisting, to him, kissed her, patted her shoulder and smoothed her hair—at the temples and at the nape of her neck, places that he had reverently worshipped.

"I ain't hurryin' you any," he said. "I wouldn't want you to take me, feelin' as you do. I don't feel right about that Blackburn affair, myself. There's somethin'

that hasn't come out yet. I'm comin' back—to you. I'll come as soon as I can."

Later, on the train that was bearing him westward, he reflected upon Mary's attitude, and upon his own feelings.

He was glad she hadn't tumultuously taken advantage of his proposal. The fact that she hadn't accepted him immediately indicated depth of character, which he had always admired. She had a presentiment that more trouble was coming to her, and if it came she wanted to bear it alone. She wouldn't evade it or share it.

He had no fear that she would transfer her affections to another man, as Dulat had suggested. She would be true to him and to herself. He would return to Paro as quickly as he could, but in the meantime he would have Jim Temple and Cheyenne and the rest of his friends watch her to see that no harm came to her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

PENDLETON had done his best to hasten his return to Paro, and yet something more than a year had elapsed when he stepped off the eastbound train one morning and stood on the platform watching the last coach vanish in the clear morning air.

Pendleton almost gasped with amazement at the changes that had taken place in the town.

A new railroad station had been erected upon the site of the old one. The new building was of brick, two stories in height, and bore a red tile roof. The new platform upon which he stood was constructed of brick. In all directions stretched stone sidewalks and paved streets. Electric arc lights were suspended above the streets, fire plugs were installed here and there. Westward were many shops; northward, where the tent-houses had been, were many small dwellings and one-story business places, such as stores, saloons and light manufacturing plants. Half a dozen new railroad spurs had been laid, and some yard engines were industriously puffing back and forth, shunting freight cars.

The cattle corral and the shipping pens had disappeared. Where they had been was now a square of grass with gravelled walks running through it. There were new bushes fringing the walks and some young trees had been planted here and there. In the centre of

the square was a statue of a man standing upon a great granite base. The square was on land that had once been owned by Simeon Calder, and it was the only not quite ugly thing on the northern side of the railroad track.

For Calder's side of town had not improved. There were more buildings than there had been before, but their quality had not changed, nor their type. There were still the mounds of coal and iron ore, still the shanties beside the tracks, now dingy with the accumulation of grime from the passing trains. Most of the buildings alongside the track were weatherbeaten and unpainted. Even the Gold Coin was befouled by the smoke and soot. Its front windows were smudged; the paint on the wood was peeling, and it stood in an atmosphere of retrogression and decay, as did all the buildings on the northern side of the tracks. They had had their day; they were the pioneers that had come in a fever of eagerness, and they would stand perhaps for years, grimy and sullen, facing the grandeur of the newer buildings.

For Paro City had grown southward. Upon one street which ran directly south from the new station were a score of imposing brick buildings with stores on the street level and apartments above. Two other streets paralleling the first were dotted here and there with other new buildings. The streets were paved, the sidewalks laid; the stores were open for business. Flanking these streets were many dwellings. Some were modest and some pretentious, but all had that appearance of quiet prosperity which is indicative of the homes of that great prop of the American nation known as the "middle class."

Far beyond the reaches of the business section and gracing the summit of an upland, were the houses of Paro's rich men. Upon this eminence—Pendleton was later to discover—was the new Blackburn home. Jim Temple's house was there, as were also Silverthorn's, and Kerry Baldwin's, and Norman Van Zeuit's, the Hollander. There were likewise the new homes of the owners of many of the shops and stores; the president of the new power company and the heads of various other enterprises.

The old Blackburn ranch-house had been razed, together with all the buildings surrounding it. Streets had been cut through the ranch-house yard, and though these were still unpaved their lines served to show something of the gigantic nature of the contemplated improvements.

The new Blackburn hotel had been completed. It was evidently open for business, for there were several cabs standing in front of it, and a uniformed porter was carrying a guest's travelling bags from one of the cabs to the big arched entrance.

There was an air of distinction about the new hotel. It was constructed of white brick; there were lace curtains at the many windows, awnings, rich-looking, shades. Over the sidewalk was a great steel canopy suspended apparently by heavy chains, its roof covered with coloured glass. A sign, swinging from the ornamental cornice of the canopy, bore the words:

THE AMERICAN HOUSE

Pendleton smiled. Blackburn might be in prison, but someone who knew of his sentiments had expressed

them in erecting the sign. Blackburn thought he was a good American. But was he?

Blackburn had committed a crime, or he knew something about it that he had not told. On the witness stand he had testified that he had not seen the messenger's saddle previous to the day he and Silverthorn had discovered it, and while he had been testifying he had declared Calder had committed the murder. Therefore he must have witnessed the crime, and he had not reported it. That, in Pendleton's opinion, was not good citizenship, and therefore the sign on the new hotel was somewhat ironic.

Pendleton had his baggage taken to the new American Hotel, where he signed the register and then went out into the streets again, to continue his examination of the town. Although this miracle of progress had been and was being enacted in every section of the land, he was finding it hard to comprehend. But the spirit which had built a new republic in a virgin wilderness would not hesitate in the mere building of a new town. With little difficulty he could envisage the activities attending the construction of the town. Thousands of workmen swarming the new structures, trains loaded with material, men digging ditches, others stringing wires, engineers consulting blue prints, surveyors placing monuments; painters, labourers, carpenters, masons, pavers, and all the horde of craftsmen milling around in apparent turmoil, but with actual knowledge of each particular need, forging ahead, completing each day a little toward the stupendous aggregate.

This intensive building of cities could be accomplished nowhere but in America. It was in America that artisans

were always at the command of capital. Here was a zest, the eagerness, the enthusiasm that found expression in work and in accomplishment. If a street was paved in a day, to-morrow, somewhere in the land, another street would be paved in half a day. A spirit—the spirit of rivalry, or pride in achievement, spurred to greater effort.

So it was throughout the length and breadth of the land. Everywhere eagerness. Sometimes carelessness. Often tawdriness, crudeness and uncouthness. These all were passing phases in the building of a national character which would one day attain all the human refinements. From this melting pot of nations, now striving with all its might to conquer a continent, would one day rise the American of the future. What sort of a creature this American would be would depend upon what characteristics endured through the propagation process. According to all accepted theories the progeny of a racial mixture, born in America, would be an American. But if the mixed progeny were inculcated with fanaticism, or misguided zealotry, or religious bigotry, there would arise a creature of hideous national aspect. And America would fail of her destiny.

Some thought of what might happen to America had been in Pendleton's mind on the day he had saved Petrone from the mob of Sicilians. The thought was in his mind when he had tried to make friends with them. He was convinced that by each American of his day the American of the future would be judged. The present-day American was the master potter; he could mould his clay through the medium of his own loyal conduct to the government whose constitution pro-

vided for the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness and freedom from persecution. He could arouse the spirit of emulation, so that foreigners seeking to learn the principles of Americanism would learn in the best school; he could be honest in his dealings with them, thus teaching them that Americanism meant more than the worshipping of a symbol; he could be loyal to his government, showing them that he loved it; he could be "square" with all men, thus revealing that the constitution meant more to him than to a great many of the politicians who persistently violated it for private gain.

Paro City had established itself. To Pendleton the allocation of the two distinct and separate sections of the town symbolized the growth of America. The section north of the railroad tracks had been first to come; it would be first to go. From its ruins would rise the greater Paro, north of the tracks. The first Paro had been crude and eager. The second Paro was betraying signs of a determination to achieve refinement. It still retained its eagerness. The Paro City which would be built from the second would be an improvement. Yet it would not be perfect despite all its strivings. Still, it would strive.

Pendleton walked down the street to the "square" with its new shrubbery, its new trees, its gleaming white walks of gravel. In the centre he paused and gazed up into the face of the man whose image had been reproduced in bronze.

He started, stood rigid.

The face of the bronze figure was the face of Simeon Calder.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DURING his absence from Paro City Pendleton had meditated much upon Blackburn's trial and upon the obviously contradictory testimony he had offered. Pendleton had felt that Blackburn had lied to shield somebody, and since in his agitation at the trial Blackburn had accused Simeon Calder, it was evident that the "somebody" was Calder.

Pendleton had determined to talk with Blackburn about the murder, but not until about a month before his return to Paro did he have an opportunity to visit the State Prison.

He found Blackburn sullen, but quiet.

"I've got what was comin' to me, I expect," he said. "If I had done right I would have told what I saw. But I kept feelin' sorry for the cuss."

"For Simeon Calder?"

"Yes. Sure. You was in the courtroom durin' the trial. Didn't you hear me accuse him?"

"Why haven't you demanded a new trial? Or why haven't you formally charged Calder with the murder?"

"Silverthorn keeps tellin' me it ain't no use. He says there's no evidence. There was evidence, but it disappeared."

And now Blackburn told the entire story of the crime. When he had finished he gazed grimly at Pendleton.

"That's the truth," he declared. "But now that I've

told one story I reckon nobody would believe me."

"That tobacco pouch wouldn't be evidence unless you had witnesses. I'm afraid you've blundered, Blackburn. Did Silverthorn advise you to tell the story you told?"

Blackburn nodded. "He said he'd arranged to have Calder confess at the trial. When he didn't, I lost my head. Silverthorn said Calder double-crossed him."

"You don't know where the tobacco pouch is?"

"I threw it in the cache along with the other stuff. When I went back to look for it, the day after I was there with Silverthorn, it was gone."

"And Silverthorn denied having seen it?"

Blackburn nodded.

Pendleton was silent for a moment.

"Well, Blackburn," he said at last, "I'm sorry for you. I believe you are innocent. I've had that conviction for quite a while. But you've got yourself into a sorry mess and I can't see how you are going to get out of it. You convicted yourself by keeping that express pouch in your possession. Now you'll have a hard time convincing any judge or jury that you are innocent. About the only thing that could happen to clear you would be to get Simeon Calder to confess. That chance is a slim one."

Standing in the "square" now, gazing at the bronze statue of Calder, Pendleton reflected. His talk with Blackburn in prison had explained Calder's act in holding the gun at his back on the night he had been sitting in the chair on the veranda. Calder was the murderer. He had recognized the sorrel horse as the one ridden by the messenger. He suspected Pendleton was an officer of the law in search of evidence, and he would have

murdered Pendleton that night if he had not lost his "nerve."

Pendleton walked down the street until he came to a storeroom opposite the railroad station. The street was crowded with people intent upon their errands, and no one paid any attention to him. He observed that the storeroom formerly occupied by Napoleon Dulat was empty, and he read a sign in the dingy window which conveyed the information that the "Dulat Store" was at present occupying new quarters at No. 16 Blackburn Avenue.

The new hotel was at the corner of Blackburn Avenue and Main Street—Blackburn Avenue being the broad, paved thoroughfare which was distinguished by many new business blocks.

Pendleton found Dulat behind one of the new counters in a spacious room which bore upon its front window the legend:

NAPOLEON DULAT—SPORTING SUPPLIES

But Dulat did not remain behind the counter. He leaped over it and seized Pendleton's hand in both his own.

"By Gar! It's my frien' Pendleton! W'en you get in? What for you stay 'way so long? By golly, you look healt'y!"

He dragged Pendleton into a rear room which he used as an office. There, after a while, Dulat spoke again.

"Paro she's change a lot, eh?" he said. "She's boom lak hell! Napoleon Dulat boom right along with her! Norman Van Zeuit mak' fortune. He's build house with the swells on the hill. Nado he's run beeg barber shop

and shoe-shine parlour in American House. Naso he's own beeg fruit commission house. He's mak' money so fast he ain't got time to count him. Lots of feller get rich!"

"Silverthorn rich?"

"Rich?" Napoleon spread his hands palms upward in a gesture which was intended to express his conviction of the futility of words.

"Rich!" he repeated. "By Gar! Frien' of mine who work in bank tell me Silverthorn put in as much money for himself as he put in for the Blackburn estate!"

"Silverthorn is acting for the Blackburns?"

"You didn't know that? Wal; he's act, all right. He's act once for the Blackburns an' twice for Silverthorn. He's sell land lak hell an' pay himself beeg commission for sellin'. He's got graft in insurance, in buildin'—ever't'ing." Dulat paused and squinted his eyes at his friend. "Neal," he said softly, "you been gone year, mebbe pretty near year an' a half. Mary Calder go 'round alone. She don' smile no more. She don' ride. Some time I pass her house an' she set there lookin' at the floor. She don' spick to me; she don' spick to nobody. Neal, don' you lak dat girl no more?"

Pendleton's lips grew white, but he did not answer Dulat.

Mary Calder's presentiment of trouble was to be vindicated. She had told Pendleton that she did not know what sort of trouble was coming to her, but her forebodings had been strong enough to prevent her admitting her love for him.

Yes; trouble for her was coming, and he would be the one to bring it. He had reproached Blackburn for con-

cealing his knowledge of crime, and if he were to remain silent he would be as guilty as the latter. He had never been satisfied with the outcome of the case, and he meant to devote his time to freeing Blackburn and punishing the real murderer. Because he was convinced that the real murderer was Calder made little difference to him. He regretted that Mary Calder was to be involved, but he could not sacrifice his principles, even for her.

He was certain that in her presentiment there was no knowledge of her father's crime. She was an imaginative girl; she anticipated impending trouble because the habits of the members of her family invited it.

Pendleton went down to the City Hall to call upon Jim Temple.

After Pendleton's departure, Dulat sat on the edge of one of the counters in the store, gravely contemplating the doorway out of which his friend had gone.

He had not told Pendleton that John Blackburn had been killed about six months before; that he had been found, shot in the back one morning. Young Blackburn had been on bad terms with several members of the I. W. W. who still had their headquarters at Linn's Hotel on the north side of the railroad tracks, but Jim Temple's men had never been able to secure evidence sufficiently strong to insure a conviction.

Nor had Dulat told Pendleton that the love affair between Silverthorn and Jane Blackburn had suddenly ended. There were rumours, but Dulat would not have repeated them.

For Dulat had loved Jane Blackburn, although he had not spoken to her more than half a dozen times. Dulat

was not presumptuous. He lacked conceit. He was content to worship the girl from a distance. The longest conversation he had ever had with her had taken place since he had been in his new store, when the girl had entered to purchase some trifling sporting article. Possibly Jane had forgotten what the article was, but Dulat remembered.

A white sweater.

In a case directly behind Dulat was a duplicate of the sweater. The same size. Immediately after Jane had left the store Dulat had taken the duplicate sweater out of stock, had held it up and gazed at it; had tucked it snugly under an arm and held it there for a long time while with flushed face he mentally reviewed his conversation with Jane.

His part in that conversation had been defensive.

After purchasing the garment she had looked straight at him with a cold, calm hostility.

"You served on the jury that convicted my father?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did you think him guilty?"

"It was very difficult, Mis' Jane," replied Dulat. "You see, I lak Mistaire Blackburn. I wan' to think him innocent. I sit there, hopin'. But there was the evidence. What I do? I'm American citizen. I got to give verdict by the evidence. But all the time I'm hopin' somet'ing turn up. Nothin' turn up until too late. Your father charge Calder with the murder after he tell the jury he never saw saddle biffore. We t'ink dat is fonny. We call the judge in an' ask him. He tell us to go by the evidence. Well, what we do?"

"If you liked my father so well you should have held out. You should not have agreed with the rest. My father is an American. His people have lived in this country for many generations. Don't you think that the fact that the members of the jury were nearly all foreigners had something to do with their convicting him?"

"That's fonny, ma'am. Nobody t'ink of dat. Nobody say dat. Mistaire Blackburn is a man. Dat's all. He's accused of crime. We look at the evidence. Ma'am; they was no foreigner on that jury. Some not born in America for certain. But every man love de country. He's goin' to make his home here, live here, raise family."

"If the foreigners love their own countries so much why don't they stay in them?"

"Some don' love their co'ntry," declared Dulat. "Too much taxes, mebbe; too much oppression. Mebbe too much work with not'ing for pay."

"If they don't love their own countries how can they love another?" she challenged.

"Wal," gently smiled Dulat, "dat's fonny t'ing. Some men love deir own co'ntry, other men lak co'ntry far away. But all men got to lak some country. A man's co'ntry got to be next to his God, ma'am. If he don' lak co'ntry he's got dead soul, ma'am. He's no good. Look at them I Won't Work feller?"

"What do you mean?"

"Dem I. W. W. What dey come here for? For work? To make co'ntry better? To raise family to be somebody? No. Dey rattle brain feller. Got strange idee. Dey make new government an' bust up old one. What for?

To make worse one, eh? Dey want grab money without work. Dey want job runnin' government when dey can't run themself. Sooch guy lak that don't love no co'ntry. Dey bums, crook, grafter."

"But they will be Americans some day."

"Nevaire, ma'am. Dey not look for co'ntry, but for themself. Dey go to any co'ntry an' try same t'ing."

"You are a French-Canadian, aren't you? Canada and France are wonderful countries. Why did you come here? Don't you love Canada and France?"

"By golly; you ask straight question, eh? Wal; you see, it dis way. I love Canada an' I love France. Both great co'ntry. But there somethin' else. My mothaire come to Canada. I'm born there. I grow up. I read of America. Somethin' about *Mayflower* and pioneer an' Indian fight, an' fight for liberty. Fonny. I t'ink America brave co'ntry. Romance here. New. New kind of government. I come an' look at him an' lak him right away. So I become citizen. I stay here."

Jane looked at Dulat for a long time without speaking. It appeared to him that she was appraising him, studying him, wondering about him. It was the first time Jane had really seen Dulat, although she had spoken to him and looked at him a number of times. She had always avoided "foreigners," and this conversation revealed him to her in a new light. She had not suspected that "foreigners" such as he loved America; that they had any ideas at all about the government—or that they had any ideas at all. She was amazed to discover that Dulat's knowledge was really definite; that he had a keen conception of what constituted loyalty, and that he was as good an American as a great

many natives who would smile tolerantly at him while considering him inferior.

More: she had discovered that Dulat had a magnetic personality. He was gentle and respectful; he was a brave man, for she had heard something of his deeds.

She was somewhat startled to discover that he interested her and that she wanted to stay and continue to talk with him. But she merely nodded to him and left the store with her purchase. However, she remembered his eyes and his frank, direct speeches.

And Dulat treasured the duplicate sweater.

This morning Dulat had been thinking of Jane Blackburn. He was thinking of her now, as he sat on the edge of the counter, and when he saw her crossing the sidewalk to enter the front door of his store he drew a deep breath, slipped down from the counter and stood erect.

He was quick to observe that a change had come over Jane. She was pale, her lips were pressed tightly together; her eyes had strange shadows in them, as though she were reflecting upon tragedy. Her smile was wintry, though Dulat observed that she attempted to make it pleasant.

She stood, gazing at a show-case in which were displayed various articles such as revolvers, knives, fishing tackle, tennis racquets, silver flasks, cameras. Smiling, but perturbed by her manner, Dulat patiently waited. He had said nothing to her except to greet her with a friendly, "good mornin'." He would not presume.

She asked to be shown a camera, but Dulat was quick to realize that her interest was not in the camera but in something else in the case. He wondered, while watching

her. Presently she placed the camera on the top of the case and, trying to make her voice casual, asked to be permitted to see one of the revolvers.

Dulat's heart had skipped a beat, but he smiled and asked gently:

"What calibre, ma'am?"

Dulat saw a quiver run over her. But her voice was steady when she said:

"A .38 please."

Dulat drew a blue-steel double-action out of the case and placed it gently on the case in front of her. He tapped it with a finger.

"Dat's bad gun, ma'am. What you want shoot?"

"I—I haven't decided. I mean I don't know. I want it for protection."

"Somebody been botherin' you, ma'am?" asked Dulat quickly. "By golly! You tell me his name an' he don' bother you no more!"

There was almost a smile in the look she gave him. But there was something more. Grim determination.

Dulat observed it; he had caught a gleam that he had seen in the eyes of men meditating violence!

"My!" he exclaimed. "Dat's beeg gun for lady to carry! Here's lighter one. It's .22. Shoot seven time. No feller bother you if you point that at him an' pull trigger. Lak this!" The hammer clicked seven times rapidly on the empty chambers as Dulat pointed the weapon at an imaginary man and pulled the trigger. "Dat's plenty beeg for lady."

"Will it—would it kill a man?" she asked.

"Wal, I t'ink if the bullet hit him in right place it kill plenty. You want for kill someone, ma'am?"

Dulat, watching her closely without appearing to do so, saw her face whiten.

"Not exactly," she answered. "But I want something that will kill if I should happen to need it. I never saw a man carry one of those things," she added, pointing to the diminutive .22, "and if men don't carry them they can't be very good. I think I shall take the .38," she concluded with an abrupt, final gesture.

Dulat smiled at her, and cast a sidelong glance at the weapon.

"Dis gun no good for shootin' without cartridge," he said. "You want cartridge too?"

Jane wanted cartridges, and a box of them was wrapped with the gun. She drew a bill from her purse, paid him and walked out.

Behind his counter Dulat scratched his head.

"By Gar!" he exclaimed. "She goin' shoot somebody! Dat's certain for sure. The .22 she's too little; she don' kill, eh? The .38 she go lak hell—she kill! By golly! Dat girl in trouble sure 'nough, if she figger on kill somebody. Long as I know her I never see her carry no gun. She 'fraid of gun!" He remembered observing her shudder when he had placed the .38 on the counter.

Dulat scratched his head more vigorously.

"Now what I goin' do?" he asked himself. He remembered having refused to sell Cosnoff a weapon, and he now accused himself: "You say you good American, eh? Dulat, you are great beeg liar. You sell gun for somebody get killed. An' all the time you sell the gun you know somebody get killed! What for anybody buy gun when they look lak that?"

Dulat walked from behind the counter. He was

worried. He felt guilty and impotent. He had sold the gun and he dared not follow her to prevent her using it. He strode to the door and looked out. Jane had disappeared.

Walking back toward the case where Jane had stood while buying the weapon, Dulat was still disturbed. A piece of note paper, badly crumpled, was lying on the floor in front of the case.

Dulat picked the paper up, smoothed it out, and read:

MISS BLACKBURN: If you will come to room 210 at Linn's Hotel to-night I will see you. SILVERTHORN.

In his agitation Dulat crumpled the paper again and dropped it. He stooped to recover it, and was aware that Jane Blackburn was standing close to him. She had entered the store unobserved. Dulat had not yet picked up the paper the second time, and now he straightened, smiled and bowed.

Jane darted forward and took the paper up.

"It is my shopping list," she told Dulat. "I missed it right after I left. I must have dropped it when I opened my purse."

She smiled as she turned to go out.

"By golly, if dat was money I see him before now!" declared Dulat.

He stood motionless, watching Jane as she walked out. Then he frowned.

"By Gar! She lie! Shoppin' list, eh? Wal! Silverthorn, whatever you done to dat girl, you goin' to get yours, now!"

Room 210. Dulat remembered that. To-night.

Certainly to-night, for Jane would not have been so eager to regain possession of the note arranging an appointment for a date already past.

"Yes, you goin' get yours, Silverthorn!" declared Dulat. "An' by golly I bet you got it comin'!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

LINN'S HOTEL was on the north side of the railroad tracks, among the shacks of the foreign quarter. The building was a two-story frame with a flat roof. Like all the other buildings in the section it was dingy and smoke-blackened by the passing trains, by the mounds of coal stored in the vicinity, by the red, heavy dust from iron ore that was continually being shipped, by the soot from shop chimneys and the light, feathery dust from the side streets.

From the first Linn's Hotel had borne a bad reputation. It had a sinister appearance in Napoleon Dulat's eyes as shortly after dusk he crossed the railroad tracks and stood for some minutes in front of the storeroom he had formerly occupied, gazing at it.

He knew the place was a rendezvous for the I. W. W., and he observed, in the light that shone from the dingy windows, that several men were lounging on the porch which extended across the front of the building.

There were no street lights near the hotel, and the building stood back at a distance of perhaps two hundred feet from the railroad tracks, in an open space which had once been gravelled but which was now overgrown with weeds.

In the darkness that swiftly settled the building seemed to recede, to slink back into the blackness that enveloped it. Lights appeared in its windows and

streamed out of the front door. Matches flared and went out as men on the front porch smoked. Lamps were lighted in various shacks. Other buildings, occupied as shops, were dark.

Dulat was waiting for Silverthorn to appear, and for Jane Blackburn. The girl's meeting with the big man was none of his affair, and if Jane had not purchased the revolver that day he would not have been concerned at all. He would not prevent her killing Silverthorn, if that was what she meant to do, but now that he knew Silverthorn had arranged to meet her in such a disreputable place he intended to see that no harm came to her.

He had complete knowledge of the arrangement of the rooms in the hotel, for he had lived there some months soon after arriving in Paro; had roomed there until he had grown disgusted with the type of guest that was most welcome there.

He knew exactly the location of room 210. It was on the side of the building nearest him, and on the upper floor. He had once occupied the room. Many nights he had sat at the one window gazing out at Paro. Below the window was the roof of a one-story addition which had obviously been erected merely for the purpose of supplying additional room on the ground floor. This roof was flat, like the roof of the main building; and the window sill of room 210 was not more than waist high above it.

Dulat did not intend boldly to follow Jane Blackburn or Silverthorn into the hotel. For some time he had been aware that Silverthorn was on friendly terms with Cosnoff, the I. W. W. leader; and he had long been suspicious that Silverthorn had been slyly directing

various raids of the I. W. W. upon buildings in course of erection, upon the mines near by and upon various factories whose owners had resented interference in the conducting of their business. And although there was no proof, Dulat felt that Silverthorn had been in some manner connected with the killing of John Blackburn, Jane's brother.

For John Blackburn had been opposed to his sister's apparent intimacy with Silverthorn. Word had reached Dulat of violent quarrels between the two men. Young Blackburn had resented Silverthorn's activities in connection with the Blackburn estate, and had gone several times to the prison to urge his father to revoke the authority he had given the lawyer.

But Dulat was not concerned with the Blackburn estate. He had come here to-night to protect Jane.

He still had possession of the key to the front door of his old place, and he let himself in and stood back from the front window, in the darkness, watching the lighted streets on the south side of the railroad tracks. He had not been inside the store very long when he observed Silverthorn crossing the tracks near the station.

Silverthorn walked rapidly down the street toward Linn's Hotel. He had to pass Dulat's old store, and as he did so Dulat softly opened the door and watched him until he crossed the hotel porch and disappeared into the front doorway.

It was not long afterward when Jane Blackburn appeared, taking almost the route that Silverthorn had taken. Twice as Jane approached, Dulat caught a glimpse of her face in the light from street lamps, and

his dark eyes flashed when he observed that she was pale and apparently nervous.

Again he stepped back into the room. He saw Jane walk with unwavering steps straight to the hotel, mount the porch, cross it and enter, as Silverthorn had done.

Then Dulat let himself out of the store, leaving the door unlocked, and stole softly through an open space between two buildings, which brought him into the heavy blackness of an alley.

He moved here and there, among the shanties and the factories, until the darkness swallowed him.

CHAPTER THIRTY

JANE BLACKBURN had been greeted by absolute silence when she reached the front porch of Linn's Hotel. The men lounging on the porch were watching her. Their silence told her that. She knew, also, that only women of a certain type visited the hotel, and she was convinced that the men who watched her suspected she was of that type.

But though her cheeks flushed with a consciousness of the stares that were being directed at her she held her head proudly erect, passed the men, entered the front door and walked unhesitatingly to the desk.

"Room 210?" interrogated the clerk. "Sure! Right up that stairway. Your friend is waiting for you. He said to tell you to come right up!"

The clerk grinned.

He grinned at Jane's back, for she had swiftly turned.

At the top of the stairs she found herself at the head of a long hall which ran from the front to the back of the building. The hall was carpeted with some dirty material that once may have been good. A number of closed doors met her quick, inquiring gaze, a smoky ceiling-lamp disclosing them. About halfway down the hall was an open door, with light from the room streaming out of it. On the head casing of the door was printed the number, "210."

Jane paused, shivered. Then she drew a deep breath and stepped forward again.

She paused again in the open doorway. Inside the room, sitting in a chair which was tilted back against the outside wall close to the solitary window, was Silverthorn. He had evidently heard her walking down the hall, for he was gazing straight at Jane when she reached the doorway.

Silverthorn's face was expressionless.

"Well, you are here," he said. He did not rise, but crossed one leg over the other, folded his arms across his chest, lowered his head and looked at her with a level, probing gaze.

"Come in and close the door," he said.

Jane entered, drew the door and stood, silently watching Silverthorn.

Jane's lips were gray. If she had ever loved Silverthorn there was no trace of that love in her manner now, for there was disdain in the gaze that held the man, and contempt which he knew could not be expressed in words.

"Why did you arrange to meet me in this place?" she asked.

"Hell!" he exclaimed in sudden, unaccountable anger, "it's good enough, isn't it?"

"For you and your kind—yes," she answered. "You are accustomed to this: it is your nature to consort with the people that frequent places like this."

"Well," he said, "get it over with! What do you want to talk to me about?"

"I am going to talk to you about my brother," she said, her voice quavering a little with passion.

"Well, talk. What about your brother?"

"I have discovered that you were implicated in killing him!" she declared.

Silverthorn was out of his chair in one movement, standing erect and rigid, as though at last he realized that this was to be no mere lovers' quarrel.

"That's absurd!" he declared.

"Don't try to play the hypocrite," she advised. "I have plenty of proof. You were not only implicated, but you gave the order to have him murdered. Sternberg has confessed that he did the actual shooting by your orders. Sternberg is safely in jail, where you and your I. W. W. ruffians can't get at him. To-morrow you will be arrested for the crime—if you are alive!"

"I'll be alive," he laughed.

"Don't be too sure!"

Jane threw back the cloak she wore and the blue muzzle of the weapon Dulat had sold her projected from it and was held steady, pointing at Silverthorn's chest.

"Stand perfectly still!" Jane warned. "If you attempt to move toward me I shall shoot as fast as I can pull the trigger!"

Silverthorn did not move, although his eyes filled with strange flecks of passion.

"Have it your way," he said. "You've evidently got something on your chest that you want to get rid of."

"I have," said Jane. "I have discovered other things. After I discovered that it was not myself that you wanted, but my father's money, I began to make inquiries about you. I went to Judge Noble and asked his advice and assistance. We have discovered a great deal about you. Before you came here, and since. We

know that you were never straight and that men have died very mysteriously when they happened to be in the way of your schemes.

"You got Father to give you a power of attorney, and under it you have systematically robbed the Blackburn estate. I have had every transaction of yours investigated. Banker Forbes has been working with Judge Noble and myself, and to-night we attached all your property and all the cash you have in bank here and in Kansas City, where you thought to conceal it. If you leave here alive you will be penniless."

Silverthorn's face was now a gray mask. He had been amazed at Jane's revelations, but there were still the strange flecks of passion in his eyes.

"If I'm alive," he said, repeating her words. "You have said that twice. Do you think there is any chance of my dying before morning?"

"I think there is, for I am going to kill you right here in this room before I leave it!" declared Jane.

She was now yielding to the passions which had nerved her to meditate upon killing Silverthorn. Her eyes were blazing, her breath was coming fast; she trembled.

"I am going to kill you for murdering my brother!" she said. "I am not going to wait for the law to take its course! I am going to kill you because you tried to make a fool of me, and because you——"

She had closed her eyes, perhaps to nerve herself to pull the trigger of the weapon. In that instant Silverthorn had leaped.

His right hand went around hers, crushing it. The revolver was wrenched from her hand. She saw it dan-

gling from Silverthorn's fingers; she saw him grinning broadly into her eyes as she swayed back and brought up against the closed door.

Before she could interpose, Silverthorn had reached behind her, turned the key in the lock and dropped the key into a pocket of his coat.

He walked to the chair he had previously occupied, sank into it and smiled blandly at her.

"Women will always be fools, I suppose," he said, "but there's no fool like a woman who finds herself out of love.

"Now I want to tell you something! This town is going up in smoke to-night! Do you hear that? We're going to show these damned United States that we mean business!"

"We?" she managed to gasp, amazed by the ferocity of his manner.

"The I. W. W.!" he declared. "The time has come for a show-down. I came here and tried in the regular way to get control of this town. I tried to get the foreigners with me! You remember what happened? You were right there in the street on the day that dago, Petrone, was chased by his friends. You saw what happened. I tried to get on the good side of those Sicilians, so that I could use them to build up an organization to get control of the politics of the town. Right then I was as good an American as anybody. But I wanted power and I couldn't get it. Every time I started anything Pendleton was in the way! Damn him, I wish I had killed him! But that isn't what hurt. It was those smug American citizens that lined up with Pendleton and Jim Temple. They're all in a clique to control things.

They don't want anything new. Everything that's new is radical. They want to go on for millions of years with the same old government, the same old bunch of politicians holding office, or trading office, back and forth, from one of the old parties to the other. They don't want a new man; they don't want any new ideas. A man can't break in on them. Your damned old scarecrow of a father is as bad as the rest!"

He paused for lack of breath.

Jane was staring at a man she had never seen before. Silverthorn was no longer the bland, smooth and quiet-speaking man she had known. The virus of a new poison had entered his mental make-up. It had infused him with a violent recklessness, it had filled his brain with fantastic dreams, it had destroyed his sense of proportion, it had driven reason from him.

He had talked wildly of his attempts to gain control of the town; he had hinted at force and destruction. She wondered if so intelligent a man as he had appeared to be could know that any attempt to institute a new government by force must fail—was foredoomed to failure.

The people of America were not wearied of their government. They would never grow tired of it or change it by violent means. For they had the ballot to wield as a weapon whenever they desired a change; they had only to vote as they wished and they could accomplish any change, no matter how radical.

But force!

Deep down in the character of every American—and in the heart of every naturalized foreigner—is a warm love and reverence for the giant among the countries

of the world which was the first of all governments to breathe the word "liberty" to men and women who had nursed a hope for that boon. Wild-eyed men with abstruse theories would not be able to erase that word from the annals, nor would its meaning ever fade from the imaginations it had fired.

"You understand?" said Silverthorn. "We are going to seize the government of Paro. This movement is world-wide! It is almost time to strike in Russia. We have a great organization in Germany. France is beckoning to us. The time for the revolution in this country has been set many times, but it has always been postponed because some of the weaker ones in our organization thought it was not yet time. But I tell you the time is here! It is right now! To-night! We will strike a blow that will be heard all over the world. When our members hear what has been done here to-night they will rise all over the country!"

Jane was horrified, but not because of fear for what would happen to the country, but because she realized that she was in the presence of a man who had lost his reason.

Silverthorn continued to talk wildly. She knew that back of his determination to create trouble was resentment which had been engendered because he had been unable to grasp the power he craved; and she wondered if that was not the reason all the other men in such organizations were so active. Not having ability to lead in established governments, they sought a makeshift out of which they might mould a form in which they would fit.

She had heard of a man named Haywood. He had only

recently claimed public attention. Had he grown to manhood with his radical ideas or had he, like Silverthorn, yielded to them because he had failed in a field of honest endeavour where competition was keen? Or did all men who were affiliated with these organizations possess characters so perverse that they resented all authority with which they were not connected?

The idea of seizing Paro was absurd! Suppose they succeeded? To-morrow the telegraph wires would be buzzing with the news. The governor of the state would act. Federal troops would entrain for the scene. Then would follow bloodshed. It would be only when Silverthorn and his ruffians were in jail that they would realize how ridiculous their attempt at revolution had been. They would then understand that their transplanted theories had fallen upon soil which would not nurture them.

Silverthorn laughed at the stupefaction in Jane's eyes. He thought she was amazed at the magnitude of the scheme he and his friends had laid; he did not know that she was merely frightened because she was locked in a room with a man she thought was violently insane, and that she was desperately trying to plan a way to escape.

"We're ready!" he said. "You don't know it, but within the past few days three hundred men have drifted into Paro. They all have arms and ammunition. Two hundred men have been here for a year, waiting, At nine o'clock to-night we are going to take possession of the City Hall and the courthouse and the jail. We are going to liberate the prisoners and place guns in their

hands. And then we are going to wipe out every man who does not join the revolution!

"We are going to take the mines, the shops, the stores—everything! We will run them as they should be run, for the benefit of the people. Direct action! Paternalism! Do you know the meaning of those things? I see you do not. Well, we will teach the country to know them!

"And you!" He laughed again slyly. "I am going to turn you over to my friends until this thing is over!"

He moved toward Jane. He was still laughing. He tossed the revolver upon the chair behind him. It fell from the chair and thudded to the floor, thus disguising the slight noise made by Napoleon Dulat as he lightly vaulted through the open window from the roof of the one-story addition.

Jane realized that Dulat had come to save her. She glanced at him once, to see his white teeth flash in a smile; then she spoke to Silverthorn.

"Yes"; she said, "you would do that."

Silverthorn reached for her. But Dulat was upon him from behind, and a pair of great, bronzed hands met around Silverthorn's throat and quickly drew his head back until it seemed it must be snapped from his shoulders.

Silverthorn did not utter a sound, nor did Dulat. And though Silverthorn struggled desperately to escape from the iron grip that had fastened upon him, threshing here and there in the room, endeavouring to twist around so that he might face his adversary—the grip continued

to tighten until Silverthorn's knees sagged, his tongue came out and his face grew purple.

Silverthorn sank to the floor without getting a glimpse of his enemy. And when he was motionless, lying on the floor in a strangely inert heap, Dulat smiled again and silently motioned to Jane.

The girl had stood motionless during the struggle, her hands pressed hard over her chest, her eyes dilated with a fear that Dulat would kill the big man.

"Is he dead?" she whispered as she followed the Canadian to the window.

"He'll come 'round pritty quick!" he answered. "Come!"

He vaulted through the window and landed lightly upon the flat roof of the addition. He helped Jane through, lifted her and placed her on her feet beside him.

The outside darkness was so dense that Jane felt she was walking on the edge of a chasm, but she took the hand that Dulat reached out to her and permitted herself to be led away.

Presently Dulat stopped. Still holding his hand, she felt the hand pulling her down, and she knew Dulat had found a ladder and was descending. She moved forward and found herself in Dulat's arms. She knew when they reached the bottom of the ladder, knew they were crossing an open space, for she could see lights in some of the shanties around her as she skirted them, could smell the peculiar aroma of weeds and grass.

Dulat continued to carry her. It was not unitl they were far down the street beyond the railroad station that he set her down, and pushing her ahead of him went between two buildings toward a street.

Jane had lost all sense of direction, but she instantly recognized a building before which Dulat stopped. It was his old store.

The door was unlocked, and he pushed it open and led her inside. They stood there, in the darkness.

"If t'ings happen like Silverthorn say they goin' to happen, this is best place for you for 'while. Dere's my old couch in back. Here's the key to the door. I'm goin' out to look for Pendleton an' other feller. Here's your gun. It's bad gun, but w'en you go to shoot him don' close your eyes."

He stiffened; stood motionless.

"By Gar!" he exclaimed. "Listen! Silverthorn told the truth, for sure!"

In the silence that followed Dulat's words both could hear the distant crashing of guns.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

WHEN Pendleton left Dulat's store he walked slowly down Main Street to the City Hall. The building had been erected during Pendleton's absence from Paro. It was large, low, with broad stone steps leading up from the street.

Half a dozen times on his way to the Mayor's office Pendleton was stopped by men he had known when he left Paro, and when he finally entered the door of the office he was seeking he was flushing with gratification over the warm greetings he had received.

Jim Temple was at his desk, but he left it with a whoop of joy when he observed Pendleton standing in the doorway, watching him.

Pendleton was soon seated opposite the Mayor at the latter's desk, and the Mayor was intently appraising him.

"So you've come back, eh?" he said. "You look mighty good! You've been away about a year and a half. What do you think of the town we've built?"

"When I got off the train my first impression was that I was dreaming," answered Pendleton. "She's grown! Man, how she's grown!"

"Too fast, I reckon," said Temple. "Her fame got abroad an' brought too many undesirable people here. Not foreigners, exactly, you understand, but the sort

of scum that gathers in every city and wants to get by without working."

"Some of the I. W. W. too, I suppose?" said Pendleton. They're as thick as fleas all over the Northwest. Their jaycats are killing all the new labourers that come into the West. The government is powerless until they make some sort of concerted action, and because the government doesn't act they imagine the government is afraid. I only hope they decide to do some foolish thing so that we can wipe them out!"

"How hard are you hopin' that, Neal?" asked the Mayor.

"Plenty hard."

Mayor Temple leaned back in his chair and smiled grimly at his visitor. His voice was serious.

"Neal," he said, "you've possibly kept an eye on what's been goin' on here. I know some of the boys have written to you, and I've mailed you a few pointers myself. Do you have any idea how many of those I. W. W. fellows are living in and around Paro City?"

Pendleton did not reply.

"Five hundred!" announced Temple. "About three hundred have come in within the last week."

"Jim, that means something!"

"Uh-huh," said Temple. "We know what it means. It means they are gettin' ready to start something."

"What?"

"Why, their fool revolution!"

"Jim," said Pendleton, observing a glint in Temple's eyes, "you know something that you are leading me on with. What is it?"

"To-night!" declared Temple.

"What? Their revolution?"

Temple nodded and Pendleton leaned back in his chair and stared at his friend in amazement.

"Of all the fool things!" said Pendleton finally. "Don't the idiots know that they can't pull off that sort of thing in America? But that's just like them. Do you remember the boy who stood on the bank of a wide river and exclaimed: 'Is this the ocean?' Well, that kid had more sense than the men who belong to that organization. For a while the kid was fooled into thinking the river he saw was an ocean, he didn't try to swim an ocean, as these fellows are doing. It's all right to stand at the edge of a frog pond providing you know it's a frog pond. But America isn't a pond, Jim; it's an ocean. And these fellows claim to have vision!"

Both men were silent for an instant. Then Pendleton asked:

"What are you doing to head them off, Jim?"

"I'm doing the one thing that ought to have been done the minute those fellows showed their hand!" declared Temple. "Come here!"

He led Pendleton from the room, down a wide hallway and to a great, wide door which bore upon the wall above it the word: "Auditorium." He rapped with his knuckles upon the door. The door opened a quarter of an inch and a man's face appeared in the crevice.

"Your pardon, Mayor Temple," said a voice. "Do you wish to enter?"

Temple signified that he did, and the door swung swiftly open and as swiftly closed behind them.

Several hundred khaki-clad men were lounging about the great room. They were smoking, laughing and talk-

ing. Rifles in clusters were stacked all around. Side arms and infantry equipment were piled here and there. There was the indescribable atmosphere that hovers wherever a group of soldiers gather.

"They came in last night," said Temple, "on a special train. They were in civilian clothing. Their baggage came in a freight car. We had it trucked to the rear of the auditorium this morning. Those fellows don't know they are here. We've fooled with those fellows long enough. To-night they'll be cleaned out so that they'll stay cleaned out!"

"I know all their plans," Temple resumed when they were again seated in the office; "and if I don't put a crimp in them my name ain't Temple!"

"I'll be hanging around to see the fun," said Pendleton.

"Here's your old badge, Neal! I'll swear you in!" He pinned the metal shield on Pendleton's coat, where it would be visible to all who looked at the man.

It was late in the afternoon when Pendleton left Temple, for the latter had much to say to him. Pendleton returned to his hotel, where, just as dusk began to fall, he drew a cartridge belt and pistol from one of his bags and buckled it around his waist.

He went out into the streets again as the lamps were being lighted, and walked down to the new railroad station, where he spent an hour or more sitting on a crate as he had sat once before, looking at Paro.

Most of the old names he knew on the signs above the stores had been replaced with others that were new to him. Dulat's old store was vacant, as were some of the others.

But though he was looking at Paro he was thinking very little about the town. He kept seeing Mary Calder as he had seen her on the night he had left Paro. He had decided that he would not go to her. For he would not play the hypocrite and keep from her the knowledge that he had come back to attempt to convict her father of murder; and he would not tell her because he would not care to see her eyes dilate with despair and accusation. He would stay away until the case was settled one way or another, and then he would go to her to explain. If she was generous enough to forgive him he might yet attain the happiness he had dreamed of. If not, he would leave Paro and try to forget her.

At eight-thirty he was walking up the steps of the City Hall, and five minutes later he was again sitting in Temple's office, with Temple opposite him, listening to the latter talking with the tall, broad-shouldered officer in charge of the soldiers.

At nine o'clock, standing behind Temple at the top landing of the stairs of the building, he was looking down into the faces of a mob that was assembled in the street, and listening to Temple as he addressed them. The mob had appeared suddenly, as if by prearrangement. There were no firearms visible, but the faces that were turned toward Pendleton and the Mayor were sullen and threatening.

"I know what you are and why you are here!" the Mayor said. "Even if you have spent only a month in this country you should be wise enough to know that this sort of thing will not and cannot be tolerated in America! Disperse! Go to your homes and become peaceable citizens. We shall have no violence unless——"

A gun roared from the sidewalk. Jim Temple tottered, tried to straighten and resume speaking, swayed, and fell into Pendleton's arms. The big doors behind Temple and Pendleton swung open and dozens of khaki-clad figures poured out of it, headed by the tall officer who had previously been talking with Temple in the Mayor's office. The tall officer ordered his men to kneel and aim, while the officer lifted a hand and cried:

"Disperse! Disperse, or we fire!"

Another crash from the sidewalk was the answer. A sheet of flame ran along the muzzles of the soldiers' rifles. Dozens of men in the crowd went down, with their fellows stumbling over them. There came more crashes from the street and a soldier toppled forward and rolled down the stone steps. Then from a corner of the street came another sheet of fire and a crackling volley. The tall officer was playing at war and had sent a squad in that direction.

An acrid smoke rose and floated above the mob and soldiers on the steps. The soldiers were armed with repeating rifles and they fired steadily, with grim ruthlessness, into the mass of bodies in the street. From the corner sounded the sustained firing of the second squad; and after an interval another squad appeared behind the kneeling soldiers on the steps and fired over their heads.

Pendleton could not see into the street as he lifted Temple and carried him into his office. A heavy smoke, like a sombre curtain, floated before him. Here and there the curtain was rent by lances of fire; yells, shouts, blasphemous imprecations, reached his ears. The two khaki-clad lines on the steps were now firing at will.

They were slow and methodical at their grim work. They exemplified the strength of the Republic; they were symbolic of a people who had fought for liberty, and who would fight to prevent its being destroyed by violence.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

PENDLETON had a deep affection for Jim Temple, and with the yelling of the mob in his ears he sat at Temple's desk with Temple lying lax in his arms and telephoned to a doctor who lived in apartments across the street. The doctor knew Jim Temple also, and must have thought well of him, for within a few minutes he was in the room with a medicine case dangling from his hand.

Jim Temple was badly wounded. The bullet had lodged in his left side, just above the heart. The doctor gave him what care he could. Later an ambulance clanged to the rear of the building and Temple was carried out by some soldiers and taken to a hospital.

Pendleton went out with the soldiers who carried Temple, and did not reënter the City Hall. He walked to the corner where the second squad of soldiers had stood when firing at the mob in front of the steps.

The street was now cleared. A few soldiers were slowly pacing up and down the sidewalk with rifles on their shoulders. The steps were stained with dark splotches; the doors out of which the soldiers had come were closed.

Pendleton was challenged by one of the soldiers. He showed the badge Temple had given him and was permitted to pass on down the street.

There was an absence of the night noises that usually fill the streets of a city. No vehicles were in sight. A dozen or so bodies of men were lying in the street in front of the City Hall. They were in grotesque positions. They would not be carried away until the grim business was finished. They had not been respected when alive, and they would receive less respect since they were dead. But some were merely wounded. None of the soldiers paid any attention to their groans.

Nor was Pendleton interested in them. A strange mood had come upon Pendleton; it had been born in the Mayor's office when he had stood there, watching Jim Temple and the doctor.

The mood was rage more intense than he had ever experienced. Rage toward the type of man that could deliberately shoot down a man like his friend. A terrible resentment against an organization which had directed its strength against organized, accepted government.

He stood motionless in the street for some minutes, listening.

In the strange hush he could hear the crashing of guns. The sounds seemed to come from all directions. Some were distant, others were near. Far down the street toward the foreign quarter he saw lances of fire stabbing the night. That was where the trouble was likely to be thickest. He began to run in that direction.

At a street corner near the railroad station he saw two men fumbling at the lock of a store door. They had not seen him, did not hear him until he spoke, standing directly behind them, his big .45 in hand.

The men were bearded; their faces were foreign. When he spoke to them, asking what they were doing, they

turned. They snarled like animals and spoke throatily:

"The Revolution!"

A light from inside the store flashed on Pendleton's badge. One of the men drew a cheap nickel-plated revolver; the other reached into a pocket.

Pendleton's huge gun roared twice. One of the men fell backward against the door of the store and went down wheezing shrilly; the other pitched forward and landed on his head and shoulder, sideways, in the manner of a contortionist attempting a grotesque trick.

Pendleton walked on, to the nearest street corner. Down a cross street, perhaps two blocks away, he saw a sheet of fire suddenly belch. There were spiteful crimson lances in it. A score, perhaps. The sound of the volley reached him.

More soldiers!

No need of him in that direction. The soldiers could take care of themselves.

Shrieks and groans came from the point where the volley had been fired. No foolishness about firing over their heads there. A deadly business. The I. W. W. would realize just what the temper of the American people was. A thing like this was intolerable. The fools! The fools!

Pendleton had grown cool now. His rage was as deadly, but he was more deliberate. He moved down another street, seeking other men who were trying to break into business places. At another corner he suddenly came upon a dozen men, closely grouped together. They were bearing rifles, shotguns, revolvers. When they observed him they surged forward, only to halt as he halted.

It was dark at the corner. The men could not see Pendleton's face, nor he theirs. While one might have counted ten there was a tense silence. Then a voice from the group:

"What you do here? You I. W. W.?"

"I'm doing the talking here!" declared Pendleton. "Who are you?"

"That Pendleton, ain't it?" said a voice.

"Yep!"

"Jus' w'at I t'ought!" exclaimed the voice. Its owner moved forward, to where a beam of light from a store window shone upon him.

The man was Petrone, the Sicilian he had saved from being knifed on the day of his first appearance in Paro. The man was grinning. His white teeth flashed.

"We lookin' for I. W. W.!" he said. "We know he goin' start dis fight. We citizen. None of our feller in dees t'ing. Russian, mebbe, an' German, an' silly guy w'ich t'ink he know better than Uncle Sam. An' mebbe fool American w'ich don' want work. But none of our people. We American citizen, an' we look for I. W. W!"

Another figure had moved forward into the light. It was the young Comeila Naso, who owned a commission house and who lived on the hill among wealthy neighbours.

"We kill six men who was takin' woman away!" declared Naso. "We make no mistake. We know 'em!"

In this crisis they were exhibiting good citizenship, grimly decided Pendleton. They felt as he did, and he could not reproach them for their killings. He told them to be careful, and left them.

He had doubted the Sicilians and the Italians of the

town. They were a volatile people. A great many of them returned to their own country after amassing fortunes in America. But they who stayed were serious about their Americanism and could not be misled by the violent radicals. The thought that he had been the instrument of conversion never occurred to him.

They had idealized him; they had sought to imitate his manner, his speech. They had even tried to shape their characters to their conception of his. If they had failed it had been because their racial characteristics were too strong to be made over at once. But they would keep him in mind, and their children would be taught to respect him and to emulate his kind.

Pendleton continued to walk the streets. The hush was not now so complete. Sounds reached him. The intermittent crashing of guns. Yells. Men running down the streets, their heels clattering on the pavements and the sidewalks. Shrieks of men being shot down. Groans of wounded. The gong of an ambulance. A file of soldiers moving down a street at a double-quick with their accoutrements clashing.

He saw the figures of men darting around corners at his approach and slinking into alleys. He saw a store door which had been burst open. The interior was in confusion and a body was lying on the floor close to a counter. He did not stop to observe the body closely, for he had seen so many of them that he was not interested.

For a time the city had seemed to be stunned into a sort of apathy. Nobody had moved. Everywhere there had been silence. People had run from the streets, or they had heard of what was coming and had not gone

into the streets in the first place. And for a long time they had stayed off the streets. They seemed to be waiting, giving the authorities a chance to quell the disturbance. Later Pendleton had discovered that the police had gone among the citizens earlier in the day and had warned them of what was impending.

They had heard the shooting, the shouts and the commotion. The heavy firing had taken place. The mob which had assembled in front of the City Hall had been dispersed. Within two hours after the first clash the firing had died down until there was heard only a shot now and then.

People—the good citizens of the town—began to pour into the streets. A great many of them bore weapons, for though they were peaceful they were eager to repulse this monster which had appeared in their social life and which threatened the peace they loved and the country they had helped to build.

For they had helped to build the country. A citizen that observes the country's laws is a constructor of its greatness. These other creatures of the monster were destroyers. They would build nothing and tear everything down.

The streets became filled with the people. They travelled singly, in twos and threes, in groups and in crowds. They stopped every man they met and questioned him. They stopped one another, and sometimes there was need of identification.

The soldiers patrolled the streets in an attempt to preserve order, but they worked half-heartedly, remembering what had happened to the Mayor.

It seemed that all the people knew where the monster had been bred. And when the streets had been combed and none but dead I. W. W.'s could be found, there was a movement, vast and concerted, toward the breeding place, Linn's Hotel.

This movement was not observed by the authorities, or if they knew of it they permitted plenty of time to elapse before they acted. It was not until sounds of heavy firing were heard from the foreign quarter that the soldiers were again massed and rushed to the scene. Then they found that the character of the crowd had changed. The streets were filled with peaceful citizens suddenly imbued with a determination to avenge the Mayor, and the soldiers could not fire upon them. They went among them, pressing them back, exhorting them to observe law and order.

But the war which the monster had started was not to be stopped so easily. In spite of the soldiers more shots were fired. Linn's Hotel was surrounded, and the creatures of the monster inside kept up their fight against the enemy. Lances of flame shot from windows, from the doors of the building. Many of the attackers were wounded, some were killed.

Presently there was a flare of light in the basement of the building. Smoke began to filter from cracks and crevices, out of open windows. The light in the basement grew crimson, and a tongue of red flashed for an instant on the first floor. It vanished, appeared again. Stronger this time, brighter.

Other tips of flame appeared. The first floor was burning. Smoke was now pouring out in heavy streams, and

the flames were creeping out of the windows and licking the dry wood of the walls.

The flames lighted the weed-grown space around the hotel and shone red in the faces of the citizens and the soldiers. The crowd pressed back, now, and a silence fell. Perhaps the men who had fired the building were watching their handiwork. But their identity was not known. If the Mayor had not been shot the crowd would not have been so bloodthirsty.

For everywhere crowds are the same. A concert of impulse, provoked by an unlawful act. A thousand brains fired simultaneously with a lust for revenge. A primitive yielding to the excitement of a crisis. Ruthless, merciless action. Afterward, regret.

The tall officer became the leader. For after the building had been fired the crowd seemed to experience a reaction. It fell back and the soldiers took up positions in front of it. There was no more shooting from the crowd. It seemed awed by the spectacle it had created. A man somewhere in the crowd had shouted that the citizens should not disgrace the city, the country.

"Let the soldiers act!" he advised.

There was no more shooting from the hotel. The inmates, facing a more certain fate than would be met by the guns of the crowd, were pouring out of the doors and the windows. They ran toward the fringe of the crowd and were halted by the soldiers and herded together into a coal yard which had a fence around it.

The crowd continued to back away. The flames grew stronger, brighter in the centre of the building, while the eaves were belching a heavy gray smoke. Later flames appeared with the smoke, and finally the smoke

itself became flame, and the entire structure was wrapped and folded in a crimson, leaping, writhing, billowing flood.

Within an hour after it had been fired, the building was a low pile of flaming embers. The light had died down. The soldiers had herded their captives out of the coal yard and were marching them away, westward, into the grasslands. The crowd began to disperse. It went this way and that, singly, and in two and threes, and in groups, as it had come. It melted, vanished among the darkened streets.

Order reigned. The law was again abroad. It still controlled. Justice would be done. Calm, sane justice.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

NAPOLEON DULAT had darted across the railroad tracks to the station after leaving Jane Blackburn in his old store.

Dulat was elated. At last he had been able to do something for the girl he loved; at last he had really cemented an acquaintance. Hereafter when she met him on the street she would smile at him and not merely nod coldly as she had been in the habit of doing. Perhaps she would condescend to stop and talk with him a little.

He was still thrilled over the thought that while carrying her down the ladder from the roof of the hotel, and afterward across the fields and into the darkness of the side streets, he had held her close to him. Perhaps she would never know how deeply reverent had been his feelings while he had been carrying her, nor how he had deliberately chosen the longest route to the old storeroom in order to lengthen the time of his bliss.

"By golly! Ain't she little?" he remarked aloud as he stood on the station platform listening to the sounds of the firing.

"She's seem lak beeg, tall girl w'en you see her walk down the street, an' w'en she stand an' talk to you. Fonny t'ing! An' she's not try to break away w'en I carry her! Mebbe she's trust me, eh? Wal, Dulat, you don' deserve to be trust w'en you let a girl go alone

to place lak that. By Gar! That Silverthorn goin' be sick w'en he wake up!"

The shooting seemed to come from a distance. Dulat could see no flashes in the streets near him. He ran down Blackburn Avenue to his new store, entered, fished a gun and cartridge belt out of a drawer, buckled the belt around his waist and filled a pocket of his coat with cartridges that he got out of a box.

He went out again, locked the door and ran straight across the tracks again to the livery stable where he kept his horse. In a few minutes he emerged, riding one horse and leading another.

He rode down the street, hitched both horses to the rail in front of his old store and leaped to the threshold.

Jane was waiting for him; she was at the door and was swinging it open when he reached it.

"Home's de best place for little girl lak you," he said as he took Jane's arm and led her to the horses. He helped her mount the led horse, leaped into the saddle on his own animal, and headed straight across the tracks to Blackburn Avenue, Jane following closely.

Some stray shots they heard near by as they raced their horses down the darkened street toward the residential section where the new Blackburn house had been built.

The house was quite a distance from its nearest neighbour. There was a single window illuminated in the second story, and when Dulat and Jane rode up and dismounted near the front door a voice from the window greeted them.

"It's Jane, ain't it?"

Mrs. Blackburn's voice.

Jane answered, and Mrs. Blackburn continued, her voice tremulous.

"What is all the shooting about, Jane?"

Jane told her, and was answered by a gasping:

"Oh, dear! I knew it would come! Do you suppose they will bother us?"

"Nobody goin' bother you, ma'am," soothed Dulat.

"You are Mr. Dulat, aren't you?"

"By golly, you got good ear for voice, ma'am!" laughed the Canadian. "Don' you be 'fraid, ma'am. You go right to bed an' sleep just lak no'ting happen."

Reassured, Mrs. Blackburn withdrew from the window.

Dulat helped Jane down and stood beside her in the darkness. He was waiting, regretting that he had to leave her.

It was Jane who broke the silence. She had stretched forth her hand, and in the darkness he had found it. He pressed it tightly.

"Good-night, Mr. Dulat," she said. "I thank you more than words can express. You saved me from—from doing a thing that I should have regretted all my life. Then you saved me from—from a crazy man. And you have brought me home, when I wasn't certain that I would ever get here. I—I hope that someday I may find a way to thank you—to make you understand how I appreciate what you have done."

"By golly! You don' need to t'ank me. I have more fon to-night than I have all my life!"

"Fun!"

Jane's voice expressed incredulity. She did not know that Dulat meant that he had never been so happy.

"Fon? For sure! It's fon for fight for lady you lak!"

The hand Dulat held seemed to grow limp and was slowly withdrawn from his. Dulat had a suspicion that Jane was smiling at him. He was sure of it when, walking away from him toward the front door of the house, she spoke:

"Good-night, Mr. Dulat. And thank you!"

Dulat stood beside the horses and watched Jane go into the house. He patted the horses' necks and smoothed their manes. For a time he gazed toward the city, listening to the commotion. Later, during a momentary lull, he heard voices upstairs in the house—Jane's and her mother's.

Then Dulat smiled and led the horses quietly away into the darkness.

A few minutes later he stole back, without the horses. He had turned the animals into the stable. He slowly and cautiously slipped up the steps of the front porch and seated himself so that he could lean against a column.

He sat there, thinking and watching and listening.

For a time there was much shooting, some yelling, shrieks. Then a hush. Then more shooting.

Dulat was interested in watching in which direction the drift of the fighting went. He saw some flashes, but they were far away. Once there were several flashes on Blackburn Avenue, and Dulat removed the .45 from its holster and examined it. But there were no more flashes in that direction.

Toward midnight, when he observed a red tongue of flame dart upward into the sky, he sat erect and mentally fixed the location of the flame.

"Wal," was his thought, "they run wild now. Them feller got no more revolution. That's Linn's Hotel, sure 'nough. They goin' smoke 'em out!"

He watched the flames grow brighter, higher. He sat there until the fire became merely a faint glow. Then he got up and slipped down from the porch. He stood for an hour near the porch. There were no more unusual sounds, no more shots.

"It's over for sure!" he muttered.

He started back toward the stable to get the horses. Halfway there he felt the earth rock with a gigantic explosion. The dull reverberations travelled in heavy waves over the city and up the hill toward him. He heard the echoes thundering afar.

Then came a heavy, brooding silence.

Again Dulat waited. Dawn was just streaking the sky when he finally mounted one horse and rode away, leading the second. At a distance from the house he turned and looked back. He smiled. He had stood guard over Jane all night, and she did not know it.

But Dulat had not seen a curtain flutter at one of the windows. Nor did he hear Mrs. Blackburn speak to her daughter:

"Jane, aren't you ever coming to bed?"

"Right away, Mother," answered the girl. There was a smile on her lips and a soft glow in her eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

FOR some time after Jane Blackburn and Dulat had fled from Room 210, Silverthorn remained motionless on the floor where the Canadian had thrown him.

Finally Silverthorn stirred. He turned over and stretched himself out on his back, writhing, but still unconscious.

Death had been very near the big man. His face was still purple; his neck was marked with red welts where Dulat's iron fingers had pressed into the flesh. He had difficulty in breathing; with open mouth he shrilled air into his exhausted lungs. He turned his head from one side to the other and rolled his eyes at the blank ceiling above him.

After a time he sat up, swaying back and forth. His vision was coming back. He saw the window, the door, the bed in the room, the chair in which he had sat. All were dancing grotesquely.

Then came recollection of what had happened, and with it a rage that brought new purple into his face. He got to his feet and staggered to the chair, dropping heavily into it and leaning forward with his head in his hands in an effort to assuage the pain that throbbed through him.

He had not seen the man who had throttled him. He

knew his assailant must have been a man, for no woman could have a grip like that which had almost driven the life out of him.

He got out of the chair after a while and staggered to the window. He leaned on the sill for a few minutes, listening. He heard shooting, yelling.

They had started! He must have been unconscious for a long time.

With sagging knees he swayed to the door. Fumbling in a pocket he found the key he had placed there. He opened the door, went out into the hall and made his way down the stairs by holding tightly to the railing.

There were lights in the lobby, but the building was deserted. He staggered out of the room to the front porch. The porch, too, was deserted.

Silverthorn stepped down off the porch and went, stumbling and swaying, across the weed-grown space in front of the hotel. He reached the street and stood under a light. He knew what was happening. His friends were bringing about that revolution for which they had been preparing. Silverthorn had been in sympathy with it. His resentment for the accepted form of government had decided him. He had thought that he and his friends were powerful enough to win. He had become convinced that the people of the country would welcome a revolution; that they had been waiting for something of the kind. He had overheard workingmen complaining, criticizing, and he had thought that when the time came they would support a revolution.

He was somewhat amazed to discover that the shooting he heard seemed to be general. That indicated general opposition. He heard rifles fired in volleys. That

meant soldiers! It meant that the authorities had prepared for this thing.

He stood, a solitary figure in the light of the street lamp. A doubt had assailed him—a doubt of the ability of his friends to succeed. It seemed that Dulat's terrible grip on his throat had brought back to him the sanity that he had been slowly losing; it had brought it back with a suddenness that startled him. For now, standing there, listening to the firing, he began to realize that such a thing as a revolution could not succeed in America.

The workingmen he had talked to had complained and had criticized. That was true. But he had forgotten that in the next breath they would praise various statesmen or politicians. He had heard them rail at one President and warmly commend another. He had heard governors of states blasphemed and mayors of cities condemned in profane terms, while the same lips framed eulogies of others. And so he knew that the murmurs of discontent had not been directed against the government itself but against those officials of the government who had not conducted their offices to please the people.

He had known this, but he had chosen to believe otherwise. He knew it now; he had been a fool to doubt it. What could his motley crew give to the people of the country? Could they give them the rich traditions of the national life out of which had been moulded the characters of their sons and daughters? Could their radicalisms take the place of the solid, substantial foundations upon which the Republic was built? Would people who lived in a house built upon a rock seek to exchange for a house built upon the sands?

Now that Silverthorn had been forced to reflect he remembered that many times he had been amazed at the soundness of views which had been expressed by the American workingman. They had absorbed the American pioneer spirit; they had inherited the sanity of their forefathers who had fought bitterly to perpetuate the government. They were sturdy sons of the country who jealously guarded it. They were freemen who could not be denied the right to criticize. But one must learn that their criticisms were directed at individuals and not at the government.

Silverthorn had known this. But he had felt that the foreign-born citizens would not be so loyal. Staggering through the streets a little later he discovered that he had been wrong there, too. He had mentally libelled a goodly proportion of the population. For at one street corner he met Lane O'Hara, carrying a rifle. O'Hara was seeking revolutionists. Farther down the street he came upon Steve Latzo. The Scandinavian was also seeking the enemies of his newly adopted country. He met Nado, the Greek, who was abroad upon the same errand; and Naso, the Italian, Joe Stoddard, the Englishman, Anatole Lamar, the Frenchman, and Van Zeiut, the Hollander.

These men were all Americans, for they had arrayed themselves against the enemies of their adopted country. Some of their friends had enlisted in the enemy's ranks, it is true, but Silverthorn thought of himself, of how he had taken sides against the land that had nurtured him. He was a native. But was he as good an American as these naturalized men who were out risking their lives to defend the country of their adoption?

Didn't the matter resolve itself into judgment by performance?

Silverthorn was in the crowd that watched the burning of Linn's Hotel. He stood on the outside fringe and felt that he was also an outsider in the national life of the people. He had tried to betray them, he had been a traitor. And yet he realized how futile it had all been. The great, placid country could not be disturbed by the activities of a parasitic element at its edges. Radicalism would be—and was—held in contempt by the people who constituted the bone and sinew of the Nation. A gnat on the peak of the highest mountain in the country could disturb the huge excrescence more than the present band of his friends could disturb the Republic.

Silverthorn conceded all this. But he still resented the condition that had kept him from gaining the power he sought. He saw his friends herded away by the soldiers. He turned, the pain still gnawing at his throat, and walked down the street toward Kerry Baldwin's place. He walked past the Gold Coin, observed that it was dark. He decided he would not go immediately to his room at Baldwin's place, for Baldwin might see his neck and ask embarrassing questions. So he climbed the stairs to his office above the gambling rooms, opened the door and went in, where he sat at a window with his head resting on his hands, staring out.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

EARLY in the morning a policeman had unostentatiously entered the Gold Coin. Presently, in seeming carelessness, he moved to Simeon Calder's side and talked in a low voice.

He told Calder he did not know what was going to happen, but he had been ordered to ask the coöperation of all business men in Paro. They were requested to close their places of business at six o'clock, to the minute.

So at six Calder dismissed his bartenders and customers and closed the doors. He had been warned to keep silent regarding the communication he had received from the policeman, so he lied and told his employees and his customers that he was taking a "day off."

The Gold Coin was closed. It was dark but for one ceiling lamp in the barroom, which shed a yellow haze over the room.

At one of the card tables sat Calder. There was a half-filled bottle on the table in front of him, and a glass. Since six o'clock he had been drinking steadily, and now his face was flushed and his eyes unnaturally bright.

Calder was brooding again. There were times when he succeeded in shaking off certain moods, but the escape was only temporary, since it was accomplished by drinking whisky.

To-night even whisky could not divert his thoughts from his guilt. All day he had been seeing Dan Blackburn. Blackburn's face as he had seen it on the witness stand at the trial. Blackburn's blazing, accusing eyes. Blackburn in a cell at the penitentiary peering between the bars. Blackburn longing for the freedom that was rightfully his, and yearning for the great outdoors, in which he had lived all his life.

Calder could not understand why he had sacrificed Blackburn. He had always liked Blackburn. Blackburn had been his friend, had helped him out of many a "tight place"; had loaned him money without asking security; had given him things, had worked for him without remuneration.

Yet Calder's thoughts were not entirely of Blackburn. He was considering himself, appraising himself.

Not much of a man, all things totalled. Mostly brag and bluster. Like a good many of his acquaintances. Selfish, opinionated, greedy. He had liked to pose as a big man in the community, as a man of importance. In reality he had few commendable traits. He liked ease and comfort, and he had not wanted to go to the penitentiary for killing the express messenger.

He had thought that with Blackburn convicted of the crime he himself would proceed to enjoy life. But he hadn't. One couldn't enjoy life with a heavy load of guilt on one's conscience. One couldn't enjoy life when continually gazing upon mental pictures that one was trying to forget.

Daily Calder's opinion of himself had been lowered. Insidiously, as if by some inward power which flashed the light of truth upon every impulse and upon every

thought, his self-esteem was being destroyed. He could assure himself that Blackburn was not suffering greatly. Instantly a voice within him cried, "Liar!" Every thought of self-justification was received by the voice of his inner consciousness with titanic laughter. He could not deceive this other self which kept a record of his thoughts. He could not pretend but that the voice laughed at him. Nor could he keep the voice silent. There were times when it would speak to him in the middle of the night, and he would waken in a cold perspiration. It would talk to him, whisper to him, laugh at him when he was conversing with men in his saloon. It would seem to perch on the back of his chair when he was sitting. It laughed most at him when he tried to keep his thoughts off Blackburn.

To-night the inner voice was reminding him of the statue of himself which rose above the white gravel walks of the square. It led him back to the day when a committee of public-spirited men had come to him to ask him to give the plot of land to the city for park purposes. The committee told him they had selected that particular piece of land because they had been informed that he was the founder of the city—he having erected the first building and sold the first land—and that they wanted to build a statue of him there, for future generations to see.

"Founder of a city, eh?" laughed the voice. "I wonder what these men would say if they knew you for what you are, a murderer? Instead of erecting a statue to you they would hang you! Hypocrite! Hypocrite!"

A loathing of self had finally seized Calder. The insistent clamour of the voice had at last convinced him

that as a man he was worthless. As a matter of fact he knew he was worthless, and that the only way in which he could redeem himself would be to go to the authorities and confess. But he knew he never would confess. He hadn't the courage to confess, the courage to face a term in prison or to hang. The thought set him to trembling as he had trembled that afternoon when, standing in the window of his saloon, he had seen Neal Pendleton sitting on a crate on the station platform.

There was something sinister, to him, in Pendleton's return to Paro. The coming of Pendleton meant, he felt, that the young man was not satisfied with the result of the trial and intended to search for further evidence.

It seemed to him that Pendleton knew he was guilty. He had felt that way from the first time he had seen Pendleton; from the day he had been told that the sorrel horse had been ridden into Paro by Pendleton.

As Calder sat at the card table he heard shooting. Crashes came from all directions. He was interested enough to go to the front window and glance out, but not interested enough to go out into the street. Some sort of a riot, he supposed. Maybe the I. W. W. He didn't care. He had his own troubles. He'd lost interest in everybody and everything. He returned to the card table and the bottle. While drinking, his thoughts went again to the statue, to the committee which had erected it. On the day the statue had been unveiled a speaker had made an address on "Americanism." The flowery phrases ran through Calder's mind. "The one hundred per cent American to whose memory this statue has been erected . . . the sturdy pioneer who founded his habita-

tion in a wilderness . . . such men are the bulwark of our liberties . . . we revere them."

Much more in the same vein. A eulogy instead of the bitter denunciation he deserved.

Well; he was an American, all right. He had been born in America and had reared his family in the country. But was that fact of itself sufficient? Was there not something else required of a man? What made a man an American? Nick Nado, who had been born in Greece, was now a naturalized citizen. So were Dulat, Lamar, Van Zeuit, Naso, O'Hara, Stoddard, Godonoff and all the others. A lapse of generations and the sons of these men would be Americans as deeply impregnated with the principles of American life as he, whose forefathers had also been foreigners.

Calder's self-loathing grew. His thoughts were settled upon the statue with a definiteness that amounted to an obsession. He was aware of his unworthiness, of the grotesque fact that his fellow citizens had erected a memorial to a murderer. A murderer, moreover, who had slain one of a race which alone might be termed American.

These fellow citizens of his were in earnest about their Americanism. The country was theirs, and they had settled it. They had fought the pioneer wars, they had built the cities and cultivated the land. They had founded an empire, they had given birth to a new national spirit. They were splendid dreamers and gallant adventurers. He had been one of them until he had committed the crime for which Dan Blackburn had been punished. He felt that the only American worth while in

the national scheme of existence was a good American. He had failed to be that, and yet they had erected a statue of him.

He got up again. He paced back and forth in the room, the yellow light shining on his dishevelled hair and gleaming upon his troubled eyes.

The statue! He couldn't get his mind from dwelling upon it. He walked to the window and looked out. He could not see the statue very clearly in the weak glare of the street lights, but he had gazed at it often when passing it and he remembered the stony expression of the face, the dull, set eyes, the carriage of the head and shoulders. When he had posed for the sculptor he had wanted to let his shoulders droop, because of his guilt. But the sculptor had insisted upon his standing erect.

"It's a lie!" he muttered, pacing back and forth. "I felt that way once, but not now. If I have to look at that thing much longer I'll go crazy!"

Perhaps he was crazy now! He was trembling, his nerves were tingling and there was chaos in his mind over the startling idea which had taken possession of it. An idea that would not be displaced by other thoughts. It kept coming back, again and again, even though he knew it was absurd and fantastic.

He paused after a while and stood under the lamp while he wiped a heavy perspiration from his face and forehead. Then, with grim deliberation, as if he had settled something definitely in his mind, he put on his hat and coat and walked to the rear of the room. He found a hand-lamp, lighted it, and carrying it at arm's length opened a door and descended to the basement

of the building. From a corner he got a pick and a shovel, and from a shelf he took a small keg and a coil of something that looked like heavy twine.

With the keg under one arm and the pick and shovel under the other he emerged from the basement. He walked to the front door of the saloon, opened it and went out, leaving the door open behind him. He stepped down into the dark street and looking neither to the right nor to the left began to move down toward the square.

The city had become silent. Midnight had passed and the rioters had been dispersed. But Calder did not know anything of what had happened. If there was anyone watching him he had no knowledge of it. There was a single purpose in his mind now, and nothing could dissuade him from accomplishing it.

He reached the square and walked steadily up one of the white, gravelled walks to the granite base of the statue. He set the keg down on the base and laid the twine-like coil beside it. He walked around the statue two or three times; then he halted at a corner, dropped the shovel into the grass and began to strike with the pick into the sod at the base of the masonry.

At times, as the work progressed, he stopped and wiped the perspiration from his face. He would use the pick for a while, and then the shovel. A mound of earth that he dug from under the base of the statue grew in size. The hole he was digging grew deeper. It went down, down, and under the masonry. Down and under until Calder was no longer visible.

Paro seemed asleep. No one paid any attention to Calder; apparently no one observed him.

An hour passed. Another. Calder's head and shoulders appeared from the hole. He climbed out and glanced neither to the right nor the left as he walked to where he had placed the keg and the twine-like coil. He carried the keg and the coil to the edge of the excavation, let himself down and drew keg and coil after him.

He vanished.

In a quarter of an hour he reappeared. He climbed out of the excavation, wiped his brow and began to shovel the earth back. He worked slowly, steadily.

In half an hour he had thrown the earth back. All the time he had been filling the hole he had been careful of the twine-like coil. An end of it was now visible on the grass near the edge of the newly made mound of earth.

Calder uncoiled the rest of it and stretched it out on the grass. He struck a match, held it until the twine end began to shed minute sparks. Then Calder took up the pick and shovel and returned to the saloon.

At the front door he paused and looked back. At the instant there came a thunderous, subterranean roar which shook nearby buildings upon their foundations. A black, belching cloud appeared for an instant above and around the statue. Heavy particles erupted.

Calder continued to watch. The smoke floated away, and a heavy silence succeeded the dull but deafening explosion. The statue had been thrown clear of the base and was lying on its side a dozen feet from where it had stood. The base was rent. There were jagged edges of it sticking up.

Calder went into the saloon. He did not close the door after him but walked to the card table and drank from the bottle.

He sat down in a chair at the table. He drank again and again. He was trembling. His face was a ghastly gray in the yellow light from the lamp over his head.

The blowing up of the statue had done something to him. It had committed him to violence and madness. It had broken the last thread of his self-control. He had been going mad for a long time. And now he could never regain his reason.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

SILVERTHORN had heard Calder in the act of stepping down into the street and had leaned out of the open window to watch him. He had seen Calder carrying the pick and the shovel and the keg, and had watched until he observed him cross the square and stop at the base of the statue. He had seen him stagger.

Calder was drunk.

Silverthorn's first thought upon observing the keg under Calder's arm was that he was on his way home with a small supply of liquor, and he wondered if the man had reached the stage where he required that much whisky over night. He knew, however, that Calder drank prodigiously, and he was only moderately astonished.

He was puzzled, though, when Calder paused at the statue. He grew curious when in the dim light from a distant street lamp he saw that Calder was digging. He decided that the man had gone insane. And though he continued to watch Calder he had no impulse of curiosity strong enough to induce him to leave the comfortable chair at the window and prowl after him.

He sat there stroking his neck until he saw Calder returning. And when he observed that Calder was no longer carrying the keg he felt a sudden curiosity to know what had become of it.

He saw Calder step into the saloon doorway. He was about to lean farther out of the window to see just where Calder was standing when the dull, booming roar of the explosion startled him to rigidity. For a time he held tightly to the window sill, listening and watching. He was amazed, incredulous. But he saw parts of the statue heaved into the air, saw the black smoke from the explosion ballooning upward. People ran out of their houses in alarm. Silverthorn saw many figures gathering in the square. He smiled ironically as he decided that the deed of vandalism would be blamed upon the I. W. W.

What in blazes was wrong with Calder? He had blown a statue of himself to bits.

Silverthorn had grown to be just a little afraid of Calder, for of late Calder had acted strangely. Yet he was curious about the destruction of the statue; he wanted to have a word with Calder about it.

He went down the stairs from his office. The Gold Coin was in the building adjoining the one which held his office, and he had only taken a dozen steps when he was standing in the open doorway of the saloon, looking in at Calder.

Calder was sitting at a table. His arms were crossed on the table top and his head was bent forward, resting upon them. His attitude was one of great dejection.

So it seemed to Silverthorn.

Silverthorn slowly and quietly stepped over the threshold. He was in the room, moving silently toward Calder. Calder did not hear him, or if he did he gave no sign.

Calder was drunk, Silverthorn decided. Merely drunk.

But he had blown up the statue, and Silverthorn was curious. He walked forward and laid a hand upon Calder's shoulder.

"What in hell has got into you, man?" he asked. "What did you do it for?"

Silverthorn stepped back several paces, for at the sound of his voice Calder had turned swiftly in his chair and faced him. There was something in the way Calder moved, in the way he stuck out his chin at Silverthorn, which reminded the big man of a rattlesnake. Calder was tense. His muscles were rigid. His eyes were wild, and the cords of his neck were quivering. His hands were clenched.

"Crazy!" was the word that flashed into Silverthorn's brain.

Calder did not speak. Words were trembling on his lips but they would not come. Passion was betrayed by his muteness, by the terrible brightness of his eyes, by his straining muscles.

He got to his feet and backed away from Silverthorn. Three or four steps. Then he stopped and stood, swaying back and forth. He was thinking of Silverthorn. It had been Silverthorn who had got him into this business. Silverthorn had his tobacco pouch. The evidence. Silverthorn had compelled him to testify against Dan Blackburn, in court. Silverthorn was holding a club over his head. He knew at this minute that he had hated Silverthorn all along. He hated him now with an intensity that was driving him insane. He would kill Silverthorn.

The instant the idea gripped him he acted upon it. His right hand lifted. The fingers became parted and

curved, like the talons of a giant bird as his right hand flashed down and sought the butt of the pistol at his right hip.

The gun came out flaming. But Silverthorn's gun was also erupting, and Calder could feel its bullets tearing through him. They did not seem to hurt. They tilted him backward slightly, as if someone were striking his chest with a hammer. But he stiffened himself and did his shooting with great deliberation. Four times he shot Silverthorn before the big man moved. Then he staggered and dropped his gun to the floor. He did not go down, though, and so Calder took deliberate aim and shot him again, in the heart.

This time Silverthorn collapsed. He went down in a sitting position and pitched forward upon his face, lying perfectly motionless with his arms stretched out limp and lax, as if he was very tired.

Calder warily circled him. Silverthorn was crafty. He might be "playing dead." If he moved a finger Calder would shoot him again. Calder intended this should be the finish.

For Calder knew now, that he had got his own death-wound. His knees were sagging. He had been shot so many times that he could make no effort to count them. There was a strange numbness all over him; he was confused by the suddenness of it all. He swayed to the card table and poured himself another drink. Then he sat heavily down in the chair at the table and sat for a time looking at Silverthorn. Silverthorn did not move. He was dead.

Calder would die too. He knew it. There were two or three places in his chest where the blood was oozing

through his shirt. There was another place, lower down, where it seemed a red-hot iron had entered, and was staying there. It seemed to be in his stomach. Yes; he would die, and he was glad of it. There was nothing more to live for. And now, since they couldn't hang him, he could tell the truth about the express messenger.

He drew pencil and paper from a pocket, leaned over the table and wrote:

I killed the express messenger. Dan Blackburn didn't do it. I didn't see him that day at all. I lied at the trial. I killed Silverthorn, too. He had my tobacco pouch. He found it at the cache where the saddle was found. I want Dan Blackburn to know that I wouldn't have lied at the trial if Silverthorn hadn't made me do it. I'm telling the truth because I know I'm going to die. I'm asking Dan Blackburn to forgive me.

SIMEON CALDER.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

STRANGE things are required of us in this life, Neal," said Mary Calder.

She and Pendleton were sitting on the rock ledge, high upon the shoulder of the mountain where upon another day they had sat and watched Dan Blackburn and Silverthorn examining the express messenger's saddle. The day was fine and clear, and they could gaze far southward over the grasslands and over the hills beyond the grasslands into the dun reaches of the desert. In the eastern distance they could see Paro City, throbbing with its new industries, forging ahead to keep pace with other American cities.

Mary's eyes were wet with tears, for she had been speaking of her father, and how at the last minute of his life he had tried to atone for his misdeeds.

Pendleton was silent.

"It seems that tragedy just *had* to come into our family," Mary resumed. "Something was needed to make the rest of us realize that we owe something more to the world than just to live in it. It had to be poor Father. But his dying saved Mother and Jerry. Mother is deep in her welfare work; she seems to think of nothing else. She has changed so completely that I sometimes wonder if I ever knew her at all in the old days."

"Shucks," said Pendleton, "she was just foolish. Is anyone perfect?"

"I believe I should not care to know such a person," she answered.

"Jerry is making a man of himself," Pendleton suggested.

"Oh, Neal, he is!" she cried, smiling.

She moved toward Pendleton and ran an arm through his, snuggling close to him.

"Neal," she said, "the day you went away I thought I had lost you. You see, I knew all along that you had come to Paro as an agent of the government." She pressed his arm tightly. "And I thought you suspected Father and had lost your respect for all of us."

"Shucks," he said, "so that was the trouble you expected?" He drew her closer. "I was wanting to take you with me that day," he added. "But I knew you would have to fight it out yourself."

"But you waited *days* before you came to me after—after Father died," she said. "I—I saw you several times and thought you did not want me."

Pendleton smiled.

"Look," he said. He opened the collar of his shirt and showed her a purple scar on his shoulder, which looked as if it might have been made by a bullet.

"I got that on the night of the revolution," he said, "while I was carrying Jim Temple away from the steps. Seems I must have had some friends in the mob. It didn't bother me much until the fracas was over. Then I spent two weeks in a hospital. There was a time when I thought I'd never get to see you again." He smiled. "But if I had known that it was Jim Temple who had

told you about my being an agent for the government, I would have held him there on the steps and let the Reds shoot at him."

"I didn't say he had told me!" she declared.

"No," he answered; "you didn't. But Jim Temple told me, yesterday.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Jim Temple is wonderful, isn't he? All the people are wonderful! Neal, I have more friends now than ever before!"

"Well," he said, "that's natural. They're just finding you out. People are just, if they know the truth about things. But they take snap judgment, which isn't proper, although it's human nature. Then if they judge wrong they are so eager to make it up that they like you twice as much. It's a way they have of evening things up."

She was paying no attention to his philosophic utterance, for her gaze was upon two riders who were in the valley at the base of the hill upon which she and Pendleton sat. The riders had just come into view, having ridden out of a gorge, and they were close together.

"Jane Blackburn and Napoleon Dulat!" exclaimed Mary. "Oh Neal, isn't Dulat wonderful! Oh, I like him, and I hope Jane likes him!"

"There doesn't seem to be much doubt about her liking him," said Pendleton. "He's holding her hand and talking pretty seriously to her. And I reckon if you was close enough now you'd see her blushing."

"She was so happy the last time I saw her!" declared Mary. "I could tell, then, that she loved Dulat. And when we were younger—before the city came—she used to tell me she did not like foreigners!"

"H'm. Well, love can't be nationalized. It's bigger

than that. A man's country is a big thing to him, but a man's love for a woman is bigger. It works the same way with a woman. Remember the woman in the Bible who said: 'Whither thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God'? What was her name?"

"Does it make any difference, Neal? Any woman would say that to the man she loved. And she would say it, and mean it, to the man she loved, no matter what his race or nationality. Neal, I pity people who do not know what love is."

They were silent, watching Dulat and Jane riding in the grasslands below them.

"Neal," said Mary, "do you think all the foreigners that come here like this country?"

"Most of them, or they wouldn't come."

"And what are we to do with those that don't like us?"

"Well, I reckon we'll have to teach them to like us. It's a mighty good thing that all the foreigners who come here aren't I. W. W.'s. There's no way of handling those fanatics except to show them that Americans will not stand for anarchy. But the others we will have to assimilate, the same as we have been doing. And we'll have to forgive a lot of people, because they are like children who don't know any better. You know, we Americans are not always right, either. We are not infallible. We make mistakes. We act a great deal upon impulse. We are young, and we are pretty apt to be over-enthusiastic about things and a little too proud of ourselves. But on the whole, we're a pretty good people. Abraham Lincoln knew us perhaps a great deal better

than we know ourselves. And I think that it would be a pretty good idea for all of us to remember Lincoln's words:

> 'With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in. . . .'"

THE END

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